

DOUBLY DEAD

About this book

Even though the suspects were few and the motive puzzling, the murder of John Thornton, middle-aged recluse and devoted father of two grown-up children, appeared a simple affair. Thornton was found in his study, a stiletto neatly planted between his shoulder blades, and Detective-Inspector Cheviot Burmann began his enquiries convinced that he had a case which required merely formal investigation.

But as he assiduously probed and interrogated, he found that the circle of suspects widened rather than lessened, and it was not until he realized in a flash of inspiration that one mystery often veils another that the killer of John Thornton came startlingly into focus.

By the same author

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QUICKLY DEAD
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THE WILLING WITNESS
DRINK ALONE AND DIE
CORPSE AT CASABLANCA

CRITICAL YEARS AT THE YARD

Belton Cobb

DOUBLY DEAD

A CHEVIOT BURMANN MYSTERY



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For
PHEBE and BILL
with love

CHAPTER ONE

KNIFE IN THE BACK

1

As Detective-Inspector Cheviot Burmann entered the house at Carhampton, a uniformed police-sergeant came to him and said, "Your Sergeant Kimber is here, sir, with the corpse."

"Good," said Cheviot. "He'll like that. I'll go and see him as soon as I've got my bearings."

"He asked me to keep a look-out for you and give you the details, sir." The sergeant took out a notebook, refreshing his memory. "It's a Mr. John Thornton that has copped it, sir, aged 56 and a widower. There's his son and daughter in the house and living here—Mr. Peter Thornton and Miss Nancy Thornton, that is. There's a Mr. Dudley Perm with them now—I don't know why, but I should say he's sweet on the daughter. Also there's Miss Winifred Corley, who calls herself housekeeper though she's probably a general servant—as far as I can make out there's nobody else for the work and she does it all, from the cooking to the slops. That's all the regular people here, sir."

Cheviot said, "And the irregular ones?"

"Well, sir, there's a girl here, too. And that's a bit odd, because nobody knows her, or who she is or what she is doing here." The sergeant looked down at his notes again. "She gives her name as Janet Jones, and that doesn't mean a thing to anybody. She's quite a stranger to 'em all."

"Oh, come," said Cheviot. "A stranger could hardly trespass into a house like this. Or do you mean it's a case of forcible entry?"

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The sergeant led him back to the front door.

"See that window beside the door, sir? That's how we found it, smashed to smithereens."

Cheviot examined the damage very carefully.

"Smashed from the outside," he said, "because the fragments are all on the floor, inside. Nobody has climbed through though—nobody could have done, the hole isn't big enough. And no doubt you've noticed, sergeant, that this window is on the hinge side of the door, and there is another window, unbroken, on the latch side. No expert house-breaker would make a stupid mistake like that, of course. So either this broken window has nothing to do with an attempt to enter the house, or else some amateur smashed the wrong window, found things didn't work that way, and then for some reason gave it up instead of doing the thing properly on the other side. Might not have dared to make more noise, of course. But in any case, nobody has got the door open this way, so this isn't how that girl you are speaking of came into the house. Are there forced windows or doors anywhere else?"

"No, sir, none. Everything else is quite normal."

"Apart from the presence of a corpse, you mean? Well, at the moment, this window stands as Mystery No. 1 with no obyious explanation for it. But Mystery No. 2—how the unknown girl got into the house—is simpler: either the door was left open, or somebody let her in, or she had a key of her own."

The sergeant said, "Yes, sir, I suppose that's so, sir. But she wouldn't have had a key, or been let in, as nobody knows her here."

"But you don't know that nobody *knew* her. Only that the people you've questioned didn't know her."

"I've asked them all, sir."

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Cheviot smiled at him. "Have you really? And did you get a satisfactory answer from the corpse?"

The sergeant looked abashed. Cheviot said, "It's the obvious explanation, you know. But never mind. Have you satisfied yourself that the door wasn't left open?"

"I haven't asked about that, sir. But Mr. Peter Thornton and Miss Nancy Thornton and Mr. Perm all say they were out this evening and stayed out till 11 or something past, which is after it happened, apparently, and I wouldn't have thought that people going out for the evening would have left the front door open behind them."

"Not unless one of them had had a reason for wanting it left open," said Cheviot. "You know, there is not the slightest need, sergeant, to start with the assumption that witnesses are telling the truth."

"Oh, I wouldn't, sir, with toughs. But these people—except the housekeeper person—are gentry."

"Oh. That makes a difference, of course," said Cheviot. He had never had much respect for the mental outlook of the rural police. "But at the moment, whether gentry or not, they are possible suspects in a murder case. However, let's go on. You've accounted for the two younger Thorntons. What about the housekeeper?"

"She says she was upstairs all the evening and didn't hear anything."

"If that is true," said Cheviot, "it looks more than ever as if the girl was let into the house by the—by Mr. Thornton. Well, why not? Don't tell me that the 'gentry' don't like girls."

"No, sir. I wouldn't, sir. And I suppose Mr. Thornton—Provided he was that sort."

"Oh, well," said Cheviot, "there's no reason that I know of why a widower of 56 shouldn't have had a girl friend. Is this girl young and attractive?"

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"Not more than 18, I should say sir. And pretty, yes. Quite a looker, really."

"Then that sounds fairly clear. As a preliminary guess, anyhow. A pretty girl of 18 is just what would appeal to a 56-year-old widower: it is always happening. What explanation does the girl give, herself?"

"I was just starting on her when your Sergeant Kimber came, sir. He took over from me, of course. But I don't think he asked her much. He's got her shut up in one of the rooms, with a constable to watch her. I heard him say he was going to keep her for you, sir."

"That's very considerate of him," said Cheviot.

Cheviot went up the staircase to the upper floor of the long, low house. Sergeant Kimber—who always seem to know, by protective instinct, when his inspector was close at hand—at once came out of one of the rooms and said, "Good evening, sir."

There had been a time when Cheviot had considered these formal courtesies at the start of a case a foolish waste of time, and had been inclined to snub his sergeants for giving them. That, however, had been when there was nothing to live for except work, so that even politeness was a mere nuisance. Recently he had discovered—quite to his surprise—that life was not like that at all. It was a much bigger—and incidentally brighter—affair, in which quite trivial things like making people happy and contented played a considerable part. . . . He had, in fact, become a married man. It was wonderful what a difference that had made. Not only did he want to make his Kathleen happy, but even such people as sergeants and constables came into

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the general atmosphere of well-being in which he now lived. Quite often he had to press down a tendency to grin like a Cheshire cat when to do so would make people regard him as quite mad, because there was nothing visible to laugh at and he was only wanting to do it because life had become so uncommonly well worth living. And once he had only just stopped himself from giving Sergeant Kimber a playful slap on the back . . . which of course, would have been going altogether too far, because of discipline.

Now, when Sergeant Kimber said "Good evening, sir," to him, he said, "Oh, good evening, Sergeant. You've been getting on with things?"

"The stiff is in here, sir," said Kimber. "Everything is just as we found it, of course, but that's not saying that anything is how it was when the chap died. There's been a lot of wandering about, before the police were called."

Cheviot said, "Of course. If he was found by one of his children——"

"He wasn't, not by the account that is given to me, sir. He was found by a young woman who doesn't belong here and whom nobody knows anything about."

"Oh yes, I've heard something about her," Cheviot said. "You are keeping her on ice for me?"

"Constable Wilson has his eye on her, sir."

Cheviot smiled—really, because Kathleen had kissed him so sweetly before he set out for this case—and said, "You mustn't let your constables fall so quickly for my suspects, Sergeant."

Kimber was considerably taken aback. He was used to sarcasm from his inspector, but hardly to that kind of thing: if it *was* that kind of thing—the kind it appeared to be—and not something nasty which would trick you into trouble if you fell into the trap and dared to smile back.

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It *might* be all right, of course—the inspector had been odd in lots of ways since he got tied up with Miss Benson—but you could never be sure with him. Kimber therefore said—playing for safety, and without a vestige of an answering smile—“Oh, I didn’t mean that, sir. Keeping a watch on her, I should have said, sir.”

Cheviot said, “That’s all right, then.” It was a pity—really a very great pity—that Sergeant Kimber wasn’t human. Now, what he needed, of course, was to find himself a nice wife. It was a mistake for a man to go on being a bachelor. If Kimber married—why, he might even become able to see a joke. . . .

But that was not the business of the moment. Pulling himself together, Cheviot asked, “Where is this girl?”

“In a sort of study downstairs, sir, which the daughter uses. The rest of the party is in the sitting-room, except the housekeeper who’s in her own room with snelling salts. You’ll want a look at the stiff to start with, I suppose, sir?”

Cheviot always deplored his sergeant’s unfeeling habit of referring to murdered people by that unpleasant word. Even in the old days that had jarred. But there was nothing that could be done about it. He had often tried, of course, but Kimber said, “Yes, sir. Of course, sir,” when told to use a nicer-sounding word, and did so for the next case; but after that he always reverted to his own natural phraseology.

Sergeant Kimber could exhibit a murdered corpse with a sort of professional pride, as if he had some proprietorial interest in it. He never showed any appreciation of the fact that it had once—and probably quite recently—been a living human being. This time, he was even more pleased than usual with what he had to show. He led Cheviot into a sort of office-cum-study on the first floor and extended

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a hand, with pride, towards the figure that was collapsed over a desk.

"There, sir," he said. "Look at that."

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This corpse was, Cheviot thought, even more horrid than the many others he had seen. And that, probably, was because of the knife-handle that was sticking up from between the man's shoulder-blades.

Still, one had to look at it carefully, and to be professional and dispassionate.

If this man was 56, he looked a bit older than that. He was clean-shaven, going slightly bald on the top of his head, and a little fleshy. He might have been a business man who had done rather well and hadn't stinted himself over spending his profits.

His body had fallen forward onto the desk. A bare desk, Cheviot noticed, so though he presumably worked in this office-study in his home he had not been working at the moment when he died. The room as a whole looked bare and tidy and uninteresting: of course, the man was a widower, and either his daughter didn't bother about him or else he did not let her fuss with his room. And yet, according to the vague preliminary theory which had formed in Cheviot's mind during his talk with the police-sergeant downstairs, he had felt some need of the soft femininity of a pretty girl of 18. Well, that was interesting—perhaps.

Cheviot walked round behind the body and looked down at the knife-handle. From the angle of its entry, the blade would probably penetrate the heart. And in that case there would certainly have been a good deal of quick bleeding.

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Cheviot looked at the wall behind the body and then down at the carpet. There were no bloodstains in either place.

Sergeant Kimber said quickly, "Oh yes, sir. The doctor says it would have bled a lot, though most of the blood might have gone inside. But there would have been bound to be splashes. As they aren't in the room, they'll have been on the murderer's clothes, sir. That's what the doctor says, and it ought to give us something."

"It ought indeed," said Cheviot. "If you haven't seen bloodstains on anyone's clothing, somebody has been doing a quick change. Any indications?"

"No, sir. But then I haven't had time to look for that kind of thing."

"It's early yet," said Cheviot. "What else have we got?"

"He had been dead roughly between two and four hours when the doctor saw him, sir, and that'd mean some time between 8 and 10, more or less. Though of course the doctor was a bit cagey, same as usual, and wouldn't let himself be tied down to that or anything else, exactly."

"Between 8 and 10," Cheviot repeated. "Are his children supposed to have been out for the whole of that time?"

"They say they went just before 8 and came back just after 11, sir. The first thing they heard when they got back, they say, was the girl screaming when she came in here and found the body."

Cheviot said, "Oh, she screamed, did she? And just at the appropriate moment, when there was somebody coming in to hear her? But whether that was when she *found* the body we don't know yet, do we? Did you get anything from the doctor as to whether a girl could have killed the man?"

"I put that to him, sir. He says someone either knew a bit of anatomy or else had some luck, so as to be able to

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put the knife just where it went in easily. But on that spot there wouldn't be any difficulty, and a girl could have done it as much as a man."

"I see," said Cheviot. "Well, there's a lot more for you to do, sergeant. First, the knife—no prints on it, I gather?"

"Not on the handle, sir."

"Then get it out and look at the blade. After that, try it on the housekeeper so as to find out whether it belongs here, and if so where it is kept and when it was last seen. Then get the body away: the cause of death looks very obvious, but we'll have a post-mortem just in case there is anything else for us. And when you've finished up here, I want you to go through the hall and around the front door. That girl—the one nobody admits knowing anything about—didn't get in by means of the broken window, so I want to know how she came: who let her in, and that kind of thing. Try anything that looks as if it might tell us something. Not that I expect you to get anything conclusive, seeing that all the people here could leave their prints anywhere in the house quite reasonably—but it's worth trying. Test for his prints"—Cheviot pointed at the dead man—"in particular, because I rather think it was he who let the girl in. Got all that? Report to me when you have done it all."

Sergeant Kimber said, "Yes, sir," in a gloomy tone. It was already nearly 1 in the morning.

As he reached the foot of the stairs, Cheviot heard voices—generally hushed but with one that was clear-cut and vivid in comparison to the others—coming from a room on his left. It did not matter to him whose evidence he heard first so he went in there.

Two young men, an older man and a girl were in the room. The younger people were identifiable, generally if not severally, from the police-sergeant's list; but no middle-

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aged man had been on that list and Cheviot was puzzled. He said, "I am Inspector Burmann of the Criminal Investigation Department. If I could know first of all who you are——"

The girl was sitting at one end of a settee, with her body tense and her face deadly white: even without those disadvantages she would not have been really pretty, Cheviot immediately decided, but she would have had some charm if only that of youthful grace combined with intelligence. One of the younger men was seated on the edge of a chair and leaning forward with his elbows on his knees and his hands clenched: a good-looking boy of what is sometimes called 'the best type,' though at this moment white-faced and drawn. It was easy to identify those two as Nancy and Peter Thornton, the dead man's children, even before they gave their names.

That fixed the other younger man as Dudley Perm. His attitude confirmed the police-sergeant's guess that he was "sweet" on Nancy, for he had an embarrassed air as if he wanted to show a lover's sympathy but was not sure that such attentions would be appreciated just at that moment.

The other man of the party was of middle height and middle age, fair with that complexion which always suggests the use of a new razor-blade every morning. He looked competent and self-confident, friendly and reliable.

Cheviot said to him, "And you, sir?"

"Charles Hadly. Dr. Charles Hadly. I'm a relation—uncle to these youngsters, as a matter of fact—and an old family friend. Peter telephoned to me when this terrible tragedy was discovered, and asked me to come round. Not that I would have needed asking, in these circumstances, as soon as I heard of things. I've just arrived."

Peter said, "Oh well, we've a way of depending on Uncle

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Charles in all emergencies. I suppose I ought to have been able to stand on my own feet even in anything as bad as this, but——”

“My dear boy,” said Hadly, “of course you were right to send for me. Even if there isn’t a lot I can do for you, unfortunately.” He turned to Cheviot. “I’ve heard Peter’s account, but of course, he is not an expert; and I haven’t been up myself, not wishing to intrude while your men, and presumably the police-surgeon, were doing their painful job. So tell me, if you can; is there any certainty, as yet, as to what has happened?”

“There is every certainty as to what has happened,” Cheviot answered, “but no certainty at all, so far, as to how it happened. That is to say, Mr. Thornton has been murdered, stabbed to death. It is my job to find who killed him. And I am afraid I have to start on that at once.”

Dr. Hadly said, “Yes, of course.” He did not take Cheviot’s hint to go. “Peter was a bit incoherent a quarter of an hour ago—and no wonder—but he is now getting command of himself and I expect he’ll be able to tell you all that is known. I shan’t be in the way, shall I? I’ve no official standing, of course, but I’d like to be around.”

Nancy put out a hand impulsively and said, “Don’t go, Uncle Charles. Please don’t go.”

“There is no particular harm in your staying at this stage,” said Cheviot, “but of course you mustn’t interfere.” He turned to Peter Thornton. “I understand that you and your sister and Mr. Perm were all out to-night from 8 till 11. Does that mean you were together all the evening?”

“At the village hall,” Peter explained. “There was a rehearsal of a show. My sister and I have parts in it, and Dudley—well, he came along with us, to watch.”

“Leaving your father alone in the house?”

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"Yes. Except for Winifred, of course."

"Winifred?"

"She runs the house for us."

"Oh yes, Winifred Corley, the housekeeper. Where would she have been?"

"She has her own sitting-room. She spends the evenings there."

"Presumably without interrupting your father, unless he sent for her. So he'd have been alone, unless—What was the chance of someone visiting him?"

Dr. Hadly said, "Inspector, do you mind if I butt in and answer that? You see, John Thornton had become a bit of a recluse. In my experience, a widower who doesn't remarry either flings himself into society or shuns society altogether. John was inclined to shut himself up alone. Actually he lived only for his children, and the rest of the world didn't interest him much. I think I could claim to be the only person outside his immediate household with whom he was on terms of friendship. I saw him two or three times a week—I drop in whenever I can, to see Nancy and Peter. I don't think he had any other regular visitors at all. That's about right, isn't it, Peter?"

"Then," said Cheviot, "unless he had expected you this evening, he could have counted on being alone while his children were out?"

"Yes. And he didn't expect me. I was here earlier to-day—between 6 and 7, while my partner was taking the evening surgery—and he knew I wouldn't be coming again to-night."

Cheviot said, "Very well, then. That puts him as expecting to have the house practically to himself for those three hours. And it was during that period that he was murdered."

Peter said, in a strained voice, "But ~~I don't~~ see—Oh,

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dash it all, I don't see anything, I can't understand what any of it means: what it can mean, can possibly mean. You see—I suppose we have to accept the fact that my father is—dead, but—he simply cannot have been—been murdered. I mean—well, that kind of thing just couldn't happen.”

“I am afraid it has happened,” said Cheviot. “You’ve seen him, haven’t you?”

Peter shuddered. “It was terrible—ghastly,” he said. “Nothing has ever been so awful as that.”

“Then you must have realized that murder is the only possible explanation of what has happened.”

Nancy had drawn back as if this was unbearable—as if she thought she could escape horrors by drawing herself away from the talk of them.

Peter said, “Oh, I know. Only—well, he wasn’t the kind of person that kind of thing could possibly have happened to.”

“Tell me something about him,” suggested Cheviot.

Nancy roused herself then and said, in a voice which she could not keep quite under control, “He was the very best Daddy that—that anyone ever had.”

“Yes, he was,” said Peter. “He has always been simply wonderful to us. An absolute brick. And terribly generous. He must have spent a fortune on us—on Nancy and me. We’ve both been up at Oxford, and there wasn’t any stinting about it, and since then he has sent us both on a tour round the world. And apart from that—oh God, I can’t talk about it now, I simply can’t.”

Nancy said, brokenly, “It is just—it is just that he has been a real friend to us both, apart from being a father. He—he has been everything to us, ever since Mother died.”

She broke down then, and Cheviot turned away. Women often cried in front of him, and once he had been hard-

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ened to it: and not merely hardened to their tears but suspicious of them, because so often they were produced as a way out of a difficult situation. But this time—either because of Kathleen or because he had no reason to be suspicious of Nancy Thornton—he was strangely embarrassed.

Dudley Perm was embarrassed too. He put a hand caressingly on Nancy's shoulder, and looked disappointed when she gave no sign of even noticing it. Then, as if he felt that his loyalty had to be established by one means if it couldn't be by another, he said loudly, "Oh yes, he was a fine chap, a fine chap."

Cheviot turned to him. "You would have had a more detached view of Mr. Thornton, naturally. You liked him?"

"Oh yes, rather," said Dudley. "Very fine chap."

There was something too monotonous about that one phrase. Cheviot said, "Do I gather that you have been anticipating having him for a father-in-law?"

"Eh? Oh yes. Well, that was the idea, certainly."

A quick glance showed Cheviot that Nancy was not wearing a ring.

"Then you and Miss Nancy are engaged?"

"Well—not engaged, actually. But—well, it amounts to the same thing, really."

"That situation usually means," said Cheviot, "that there is some parental objection. Didn't Mr. Thornton approve of you?"

Peter said, "You don't have to go into all that, do you? It can't have anything——"

Dr. Hadly said, "I wouldn't interfere for worlds, Inspector, but must you really? Embarrassing for them, you know, particularly just now. So if it doesn't have any particular bearing on your case——"

"I like to get the whole picture," said Cheviot, suavely but very firmly. "I'll be able to see later what has a bear-

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ing on my case and what hasn't. I take it that Mr. Thornton objected to this proposed marriage, but didn't object to Mr. Perm going out with his daughter. Or didn't he know that Mr. Perm. was going out with her to-night?"

Dudley answered that himself. "He didn't stop Nancy from seeing me."

"That is hardly an answer to my question, Mr. Perm."

Peter said, "This has nothing to do with you. Sorry to sound rude, but there it is."

"And I am sorry to be insistent," said Cheviot. "But I have been given a picture of your father's relations with you and your sister, implying perfect understanding, trust and friendship. Now it comes out that he was objecting to your sister's engagement—and it looks very much as if you were all defying him. That is hardly the same picture."

Peter said, "Oh hell! Sorry. But it wasn't like that at all. Dad didn't think Dudley was good enough—well, quite the right chap for Nancy, so there wasn't any engagement: Nancy wouldn't go against Dad, even in that. But Dad didn't object to their being friends so Dudley came around with us. So long as I was there too, I mean."

"I see," said Cheviot. "And for the future? Or was Mr. Perm satisfied with that arrangement by which he could not see his—couldn't see Miss Nancy alone?" He turned to Dudley. "Had you put marriage finally out of your mind?"

"No, of course not. I was always pretty sure he'd come round in the end, you know."

"Not much of a position for you, all the same. You must have felt badly about it. So I take it that your description of him as 'a very fine chap' hardly expresses what you really felt?"

"Oh, well——" said Dudley. He was certainly embarrassed about that, with sidelong glances at Nancy amid looks

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of indignation at Cheviot. "Well, he was a fine chap, even if he was being a bit of a plague—a trial, I mean—to me."

"I see," said Cheviot. He felt that Perm had got out of his predicament rather cleverly. Probably quite a clever man, even if he had a manner which suggested that he was something of a fool. But that was hardly what mattered, when there was the more important question of whether he had also got out of a greater predicament—with the aid of a knife. For certainly Mr. Dudley Perm had a motive for this murder.

4

Cheviot said, "Now tell me about this evening. Did you come to the house just before 8, Mr. Perm, or was there a rendezvous outside?"

"Oh. Well, it didn't seem worth while coming up the drive, just to go back again, so I stopped by the gate."

"Quite so," said Cheviot. "And yet you felt it safe to come to the house at 11?"

"It wasn't a question of safety. Peter has told you. We all three went about together."

"What had you been doing all the evening? As you hadn't a part in the play——"

"I was watching."

"The only spectator? Then you were alone. In the hall all the time?"

"Oh yes, rather. I didn't go outside, all the evening, if that's what you mean."

"It is," said Cheviot.

It did not sound as if Perm would have a strong alibi. On the other hand, suspicion and proof were very different things. And there was a lot more ground to be covered yet.

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5

Cheviot turned to Peter Thornton. "Now tell me what happened when you got back to this house."

"Oh," Peter seemed to have to make an effort to talk about it. "The front door was open when we arrived and that seemed a bit odd, because it never is left open at night and I had seen Nancy shut it when we left."

"Oh, it was open then, was it?" said Cheviot. "That is very interesting."

"At first I couldn't understand why it was open," Peter went on. "Then Dudley pointed out the broken window. I think I said, 'Good Lord, the place has been burgled.' I remember I did some quick thinking and decided that someone must have broken in by the window and then have gone out by the door, leaving it open behind him. But we didn't stop for that, we all dashed into the hall. And then we were pulled up short, because we heard that girl screaming."

Cheviot said, "Oh yes. I was coming to her. Who is she?"

"I've no idea. Can't think what she was doing in the house."

"Her name, I gather, is Janet Jones," said Cheviot. "Does that help you to identify her?"

"Janet Jones? No, I've never heard of anyone called that."

Cheviot said, "You haven't either, Miss Thornton?"

"No. No, never."

"Then it looks as if she must have been a friend of your father's. Even if he didn't have regular visitors——"

"Oh, that's out of the question," cried Peter. "Dad wouldn't have known a girl like that."

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Cheviot said, "Like what?"

"Well—I mean, she is about the same age as Nancy and me, and of course if he had known her he would have had her to tea, to meet us. I mean, he certainly wouldn't have asked her to call when we were both out."

"Oh, I think he might have done," said Cheviot. "But we can leave that point for the moment: I'll find out in due course why she was here. Go on with what happened after you heard the scream."

"Yes, but I don't want you to think——" Peter broke off and looked at his sister. "If you are implying that my father had secret friendships—well, he wasn't that sort of man at all. He was always perfectly open—he told us everything about himself."

Since no father is ever "perfectly open" with his children, that could hardly be believed. In fact, all it did was to show Peter's blind trust: and the blindness made anything he said about his father of comparatively little value. Cheviot wondered whether Dr. Hadly would know better. But it seemed hardly fair to question him in front of these trusting children.

"All right," he said. "Then I'll be content with that. Now go on."

For a moment Peter looked dissatisfied. Then, after another glance at his sister, he said, "Well—the girl came pelting down the stairs. Panic-stricken, as far as I could see. She stopped short when she saw us, as if she hadn't expected there to be anyone in the hall. I—I think for a moment she nearly bolted upstairs again. Then she seemed to change her mind and she came down. She cried out something about someone being dead. So—so of course I ran upstairs to see."

"You alone?"

"Yes. I told Nancy to wait."

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"You didn't go, Mr. Perm?"

"No. Well, it was more Peter's job than mine, if it was his father who was dead: and naturally I stayed with Nancy."

Cheviot pounced on that. "You knew it was Mr. Thornton who was dead, and not the housekeeper?"

"No, of course I didn't, of course not. I hadn't any idea. I couldn't believe *anyone* was dead, really. But if someone was—well, naturally I thought of Mr. Thornton rather than of Winifred."

"I don't see why," said Cheviot.

He reflected that Mr. Perm had been a good deal less ingenious in his wriggling that time—probably he had been very nearly caught. A more formal interview, alone with him, might produce some very good results. But he was quite sharp enough to have seen how suspicion was falling, and a sleepless night first should make him jittery.

"I think that is all I need from you at the moment," Cheviot said. "But there will be more questions in the morning. I shall certainly want to see you again, Mr. Perm. I suppose you will be going home to bed now, but I shall need your address."

Dudley said, "Oh yes, of course. I'm not far away, just round the corner as a matter of fact. I shall be going out about eleven, but anything I can do before then——"

Having taken the address, Cheviot turned to the door. As he went, he heard Dr. Hadly say, "I'll give Nancy a sedative. You can have one as well, if you like, Peter: in fact I think you had better." Peter said, "No, I'd rather not, thanks." Dr. Hadly followed Cheviot out of the room. In the hall, with the door closed behind him, he said, "I'd like to keep in touch with these youngsters, if you've no objection, so I'll make this my first call after morning surgery." Then, after a second's hesitation, he went on, "I

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didn't want to say anything in front of Peter and Nancy, but of course I saw the drift of your questioning about their father. I should say, as Peter did, that he wasn't that sort. But I admit that that's a thing you nēver know about any man. And of course if he *had* gone in for that kind of thing, his children wouldn't have known of it."

"Of course not," agreed Cheviot. "Would *you* have known, Dr. Hadly?"

"No. John wasn't the man to take anyone into his confidence, on a point like that. Anyway, I certainly didn't know."

6

Cheviot was tempted to go next to see Miss Janet Jones: but he decided to leave her to the last, seeing the house-keeper first.

When he discovered her room on the first floor, he was very much interested by the fact that it was next door to that in which Mr. Thornton's body had been found. Almost for certain she must have heard something from that room during the evening.

She proved to be an angular, not very agreeable-looking woman of 40: hardly the type, in Cheviot's opinion, to be reduced, even by sudden death—or at any rate by the sudden death of someone who was no more to her than an employer—to the smelling salts of which Sergeant Kimber had spoken. Yet there they were, on the table. And now she was further restoring her shattered nerves with strong tea.

When Cheviot had said, "I am a police officer," she said, "Terrible, it's been to-night, a real shock. It fair knocked me endwise. To think of him being all spry when

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I saw him only a few hours before, and now dead. And killed too, by what I'm told, which shouldn't happen. Not like just dying because you are ill, is it?"

"Dying of a stab wound would be nice and quick," said Cheviot. "Now, suppose you tell me——"

"Oh, there's nothing I can tell you," she retorted. "I don't know a thing."

"That's all right," said Cheviot. "But you may know more than you think you do."

"That's as may be. But I haven't stirred out of this room the whole evening, not since half past eight when I got the washing-up done. So you can't expect me to know what's gone on."

Cheviot did not believe in rushing this kind of witness: it was often better to go all round the town and come back to what mattered when the atmosphere had become nice and conversational. So he said, "What I am hoping you can tell me is what sort of man Mr. Thornton was. You wouldn't have prejudices, as his children naturally have, and you would have a detached view. So your account ought to be of particular value. And I expect you've seen quite a lot of him. Did you get on well with him?"

"Well enough," she answered. "He wasn't the chatty kind, and still less the kind that think you ought to lower yourself by being equals with them—not that I'd stay with anyone like that—so it didn't matter to me if he was just a bit difficult now and then."

"Difficult?"

"Oh, not more than most people. I'm not saying that. But being chatty is one thing I don't like, and not being chatty is another, if you see what I mean. There's something in between, isn't there? Now, Mr. Thornton—he just shut himself up all the time, and you might as well not have been there. Lots of times he didn't even answer

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when I spoke to him. I do like a return when I say it's a nice day, and not just a look as if I oughtn't to have said anything."

"Putting you in your place," said Cheviot."

"Putting me in what he thought was my place. But that's all. Apart from that, he was all right. I didn't have any real trouble with him and I'd nothing to complain of."

"Then," said Cheviot, "the only person I have heard of who did get up against him is Mr. Perm."

"Mr. Thornton didn't like *him*, that's certain. Or think him good enough for Miss Nancy. Which he isn't, if you ask me. Not that I've anything against him, not knowing much about him. And I don't think Mr. Thornton had anything against him, not that counted. Except that he hasn't a job—not a regular job, with money coming in all the time. He just makes a bit here and a bit there."

"What does he do?"

"He takes photographs of people when they aren't looking and gets them into the papers. Actresses on the beach in their bathing suits, and the less the better." She sniffed expressively, and Cheviot reflected that her attitude might be affected by the fact that her own figure was hardly the kind that would attract a camera-man. "And he writes about people, too," she said. "Nasty bits of gossip, I suppose."

"A press photographer and journalist, you mean?" said Cheviot. "That can be quite a good thing, I believe."

"Sort of snooping, it seems to me," she said. "Anyway, it didn't appeal to Mr. Thornton, a good steady income being what he wanted for anyone who married his daughter. So he wasn't having it and I don't blame him."

"Come to that, neither do I," said Cheviot. "So we are in agreement about that, Miss Corley. By the by, I see

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that this room is next door to Mr. Thornton's study." He got up and banged his fist on the wall. "Not much more than a partition, I fancy. Did he ever complain that you were making too much noise in here?"

"He would have done if I had, I dare say. But I don't. I'm not one of those that like the wireless, blaring fit to blow your head off. I like reading a nice story in one of the magazines."

"A good thing for him," said Cheviot. "But I daresay the noises in his room interrupted your reading."

"Oh, he wasn't noisy. Sitting there all alone, there wasn't much for him to make a noise about."

"Then last night must have been quite exceptional?"

"Oh, I never heard anything," she answered.

"Oh, but surely? There must have been quite a few unusual sounds."

"I didn't hear any. Not to notice, anyway."

"Nothing to suggest that someone else came into his room?"

"No, nothing like that. Of course, now you mention it, there were sounds, but they weren't anything unusual and I didn't pay any attention."

"Not even a cry at the moment when he was stabbed?"

"If I'd heard him call out, I'd have gone to see what was the matter. Well, naturally. But I didn't. There wasn't anything to notice till I heard that girl's scream, just after eleven o'clock."

"I see," said Cheviot. He was greatly surprised. It was hardly possible that Thornton could have been murdered by stabbing in the room next to hers, without her hearing any unusual sounds. Of course, if the murderer knew she was so close, he would have stepped silently and wouldn't have given himself away by speaking. But surely Mr. Thornton would have had something to say? Unless, of

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course, the murderer had been someone he explicitly trusted, so that when the knife came in he was completely taken by surprise. . . . It could be that, of course. Yet even then, there must have been a cry at the last moment. And all that this Miss Corley had heard—Well, you could only account for that on the assumption that Thornton's cry of pain had been drowned by the scream of the girl. In which case——

Certainly, this put an entirely different aspect on the case. Unless the housekeeper was lying, it looked as if the Jones girl must have murdered Thornton.

If she had done, she might have screamed in horror at what she had done—and at the sight of the spurting blood—and her scream would have hidden any cry made by her victim.

At the moment, it looked as if that conclusion was inescapable. Miss Corley was obviously not stone deaf, and even sleep would hardly account for her missing a murdered man's cry. So either she was now lying—in which case she had presumably murdered Thornton herself; or else she was telling the truth—and the murderer was the girl, Janet Jones.

7

Cheviot said, "What did you do, when you heard the scream?"

"You see," she answered, "I think I had just dropped off, because in the ordinary way I go to bed at 10, having to be up early in the morning, but I was sitting up last night, with Miss Nancy and Mr. Peter out, in case they wanted anything when they got back. So I'd just dropped off. And then——"

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"Wait a minute," said Cheviot. "Had you been asleep for long?"

"I didn't say I was asleep, I said I'd dropped off. That's different. Just nodding a bit in my chair, I was, not properly asleep. And then there was that scream, and it fair froze me. I couldn't understand it, there being nobody in the house except Mr. Thornton and me, and this was a girl screaming. But then I saw the time, just after 11, and I supposed it was then come back and Miss Nancy screaming, though why, I didn't know and couldn't imagine."

"You mean that you sat and thought all that out, instead of running to see what was the matter?"

"I'd have run quick enough if I'd been properly awake," she retorted, "but I had to gather my wits. And it was only a minute or two that I waited, anyhow. Then I went out into the corridor, and I found Mr. Peter coming out of his father's room. He said his father was dead, and I said, 'Oh no, he can't be,' and he said, 'Yes he is, he has been murdered, stabbed with a knife in his back.'"

"I see," said Cheviot. "I'll take that as the gist of what he said, if not the actual words. What did you do then?"

"Terrible I felt, simply terrible," she said. "Naturally, I just couldn't believe it: only he seemed so certain."

"You didn't go into the room to see for yourself?"

"No, I didn't. Not liking to, in case it was true. And anyway he wouldn't let me. I think he thought I was going to, because he said, 'No, don't go in, it's not a thing you ought to see.' So I went downstairs instead, thinking I had better see if I could help Miss Nancy: and not wanting to be left by myself, anyway."

"Very well," said Cheviot. "In the hall you found Miss Nancy and Mr. Perm. And anyone else?"

"There was that girl."

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"Miss Jones?"

"If that's her name. I wouldn't know at all."

"Then it wasn't you who let her into the house?"

"Me? Of course not. I told you I didn't leave my room the whole evening."

"So you did," said Cheviot. "But you didn't come up till 8.30 you said. You might have let her in before that."

"I certainly didn't. I hadn't set eyes on her before I saw her in the hall."

"The only other person who can have let her in is Mr. Thornton."

"Perhaps he did. I'm sure I wouldn't know."

"Even if you didn't hear things happening in his room, you would surely have been bound to hear him opening his door and going downstairs?"

"I didn't, anyway. But of course he did go down a bit earlier. I passed him on the stairs as I was coming up. He was going to get his supper, I suppose."

"Oh," said Cheviot. "At 8.30, you mean? Did you hear him come up again?"

"About five minutes later. He always helps himself out of the larder and brings things up, to have his meal in his room."

"I see," said Cheviot. "He could have let the girl in during those five minutes, then. Would you have known if she had rung the bell?"

"When I come up for the evening," she explained, "I switch the bell through to my room. But it didn't ring last night, that I do know."

"Then presumably she came by appointment, at 8.30, and Mr. Thornton had the door open for her. Very well, I think that is all for the moment. Now, you had better go to bed, hadn't you? It is just after 2 in the morning."

"Though it's not likely I'll sleep," she said.

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Then, when he had reached the door, she suddenly said, "There's just one thing. Not that it's anything to do with what has happened, but you'll hear all about it from Mr. Peter or Miss Nancy, I suppose, and then if I haven't told you, you'll think I was keeping dark. Which I'm not and wouldn't want to. Even though it's not a bit important."

Cheviot came back into the room. "What is it?"

"When I told you I didn't have any trouble with Mr. Thornton," she said. "Well, there was one little bit, a couple of weeks ago, and actually I gave in my notice over it, only Miss Nancy begged me not to go, so I took it back, just to please her. Though I wouldn't promise not to give it again, if there was more of the same."

"Ah," said Cheviot. "You said, if I remember aright, that you had nothing to complain of. But there was something?"

"Not so very much, really, only it got me bothered at the time and it didn't seem right. You see, Mr. Thornton was always a bit fussy about his room, wanting everything put back where it was, after I'd dusted, even to an inch. Quite a scene he used to make about that, and at last he told me not to dust the room at all. And then he used to get at me sometimes, saying I had been dusting, after he'd told me not to. Which I didn't like, it being doubting my word. Though as a matter of fact," she added, "I *had* kept on with it, after a fashion, going in when he was out and doing a bit, because I can't leave my work undone with the place filthy. But I always left some dust where he'd see it, so that he shouldn't suspect, and I got a bit upset when he told me to my face, more or less, that I was telling him lies."

Cheviot smiled. He liked that.

"And you handed in your notice, out of righteous indignation?"

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"Wouldn't you," she demanded, "if someone called you a liar? In the heat of the moment, I mean. Only I calmed down, of course, and when Miss Nancy asked me to stop on——"

"Anyhow," said Cheviot, "that is the worst trouble you've had with him?"

"That's the only bit," she answered. "And I wouldn't have bothered to tell you, only you'd have heard and have thought I was trying to deceive. Which is a thing I wouldn't do, to you or anyone."

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNBELIEVABLE STORY

1

THIS time, Cheviot had little difficulty in finding the room in which Miss Janet Jones was being guarded by Constable Wilson.

He saw at once that she was very young—only 17 or 18, probably—and decidedly pretty, with a mop of auburn hair. Judging by first impressions, it looked as if she was a little unsure of her position, but wanted not to show it: if so, she was not completely succeeding, but that fact served more than anything to emphasize the determination. She probably had a good deal of character.

Apparently, she was not quite “a lady”—not “of the gentry,” as the local police-sergeant would have put it—but near enough for it not to count in these days. But she was not one of those “not quite” young girls who try to be “quite quite” and make a deplorable hash of it, through lack of taste. Though shorts are not the most attractive form of feminine attire, they quite suited Miss Jones, and her pullover revealed a figure which fortunately was not over-emphasized although there was enough to suggest that it might develop into something quite lovely in the course of a year or two.

Thus on the whole Cheviot was favourably impressed by her. But that, of course, was as a man, not as a detective. He knew only too well that pretty women could be dangerous, and lovely women doubly so: and he saw no reason to suppose that that danger could not start on the very threshold of maturity.

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He was not altogether surprised when she started perkily, even cheekily, "Are you a policeman too?" she asked. "Do come in, if so. I can't get a word out of this man, however hard I try, and waiting here all this time has been most frightfully dull."

Constable Wilson said stolidly, "Didn't think you'd want a statement from her till you were ready to take it, sir."

Cheviot wondered irrelevantly whether silence had been a strain to him. Some young constables would have been quite happy over being shut up alone with a very pretty girl even if she was a possible suspect for murder. But then, Constable Wilson had a slight cast in his left eye, and was probably sensitive where girls were concerned.

"I think you had better wait outside, Constable. I'll call you in if I want notes taken."

He stood for a moment, when they were alone, confirming his first impressions of the girl. Then he said, "I understand that you have given your name as Janet Jones."

"Yes. That's right."

"And apparently neither Mr. Peter nor Miss Nancy, nor Mr. Perm nor Miss Corley, the housekeeper, is acquainted with you."

"If those are their names—the people in the house, I mean—no, I never set eyes on any of them till to-night."

"Then perhaps you can explain what you are doing here," Cheviot said.

"Oh, I can, certainly," she cried.

She suddenly smiled. It was a very fetching smile, even if a trifle impertinent: but at the same time it did not seem quite sure of itself.

"The trouble is," she said, "that you won't believe a word I say."

For a moment Cheviot was taken aback. "Is there any reason why I shouldn't believe you?" he demanded.

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"N—no, not really. Except that it all sounds so frightfully improbable. Honestly, I don't think I'd believe it myself, if somebody told it to me."

"Still," said Cheviot, "if it is the truth——"

"Oh, it is, every word of it. I couldn't make up anything as improbable as this, if I tried. I mean, if I wanted to make up anything, which I don't."

"I see," said Cheviot. "Then you had better tell me the story, and I'll see whether I can believe it."

He settled himself in one of the two easy chairs and prepared to listen.

2

She drew a deep breath. Then she began her story.

"I am really on a hike," she said. "Not that I am frightfully fond of walking, only holidays in boarding-houses are so stuffy and ordinary, and one never gets any out-of-the-way sort of fun. I mean you only meet people like yourself and the ones you can always meet at the Palais de Danse. Whereas out on a hike, anything may happen and you sometimes meet the weirdest people and have adventures."

"You are walking by yourself—alone?"

"Oh, rather. I always do. It is much more fun, that way—in fact it is the only way to have any fun at all. I mean, if you go hiking with another girl, she is either prettier than you and cuts you out, or else she isn't and then you cut her out and she gets snappy. And going with a man is tame unless you are sweet on him—and if you are, what's the sense in wasting all the time in just walking? Besides, I'm not, at the moment."

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"I see," said Cheviot. He judged that Miss Jones either had a sex-complex or—more probably—thought it sounded grown-up to pretend she had one. He also thought her a little long-winded: it would take all the night if she told things at that length. "Well," he said, "that is clear enough so far. And it accounts for those clothes. But"—he looked round the room—"if you are hiking, you must have a rucksack or something."

"I had, up to a few hours ago," she answered. "But I lost it. That comes into the improbable part of the story."

Cheviot said, "Oh." If she was going to meet every logical criticism of what she said in that way—"Well, go on," he said.

"Yes, I think I had better tell it in my own way," she said. "It is going to be difficult if you interrupt—still more difficult, I mean. You see, I was on this hike, and I had been unlucky and not met much fun. So I thought I'd get down as quickly as possible to the coast. People aren't so sticky there, as you may have noticed. So I started taking short cuts across country, in order to get along faster. Only then I got lost. Hadn't the least idea in the world where I was, as a matter of fact, and it was getting late and I didn't know which way I had to go for Carhampton, where there is a Youth Hostel. I really was completely lost, without an idea which was the right direction even. So it was quite a relief when I came to some crossroads with a signpost. I took out my torch—"

She paused for a second, having apparently a sense of drama.

"And then I heard him calling to me," she said.

Cheviot said, "Him?" Though of course all—or at any rate the explanation of the girl's presence in the house—was becoming pretty clear now. Mr. Thornton—the lonely

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widower who had shut himself in his room—had wanted company and had gone out to collect it from the highways and hedges. Well, why not? As far as that went, anyhow.

But had that escapade led directly to his death? Had he really been killed by this girl—this child, almost—because of that? Of course, it wouldn't be impossible to believe that she had suddenly come up against—well, against practical experience of life, and hadn't liked it, and had panicked into murder. If that was it, the hiding of Thornton's death-cry by her scream was accounted for. And yet— Surely a girl of 17 or 18 who had committed murder in a moment's panic would immediately be shocked into confession? Surely she wouldn't start on a long and rambling story, with this perkiness? Surely she would be frightened, and in tears?

Cheviot came out of his thoughts to hear her saying, "I never knew who he was. I'll be coming to that in a minute. He never told me his name or anything about himself."

Cheviot said, "But— Oh well, you had better go on with your story. But in view of what you are telling me I must warn you that anything you may say may be taken down in writing and used in evidence."

He went to the door and called in Constable Wilson.

The girl said, "Just as you like, if that helps. But I don't see how it can. I am only telling you how I come to be in the house."

Certainly, she was unbelievably cool.

"He asked if I was lost and where I wanted to go," she went on. "I said Carhampton, and he said that was a good

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eight miles away and he had a car and would I like a lift. Of course that is how they all start—I've had lots of it. Only this man didn't look the type, if you know what I mean. That is to say, he was old enough to be decent without being old enough to be silly. Besides, he didn't leer at me, and he didn't seem certain I'd jump at the idea: you know, when they mean the other thing they always seem jolly sure of themselves, either because they are, or because they aren't and they want you to think they are.

Cheviot was watching the girl with fresh interest. She really did look only 17. He said, "You seem to have made a study of men of that type. Quite experienced, aren't you?"

"You can't help meeting lots of them," she explained, "if you go about a bit and aren't too frightfully plain. And as a matter of fact, I think I'm rather pretty. Don't you?"

Cheviot was quite unable to decide whether that was *naïveté* or premature archness. But, whatever it was, it did not fit with bloodstained hands. This girl simply *couldn't* have stabbed a man to death only four or five hours ago—and now be talking in this way: talking in this way, moreover and to put it on another plane, to the detective whom she would know might arrest her at any moment! It just wasn't possible.

And yet—There was the fact that she had been picked up by the murdered man—she had remained in the house all the evening—and, unless some other explanation was forthcoming, she had screamed, in his room, at the very moment when he died.

He pulled himself together, and tried to look official. She was smiling at him, as she again said. "Don't you

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think I'm pretty?" So he answered, very firmly, "Never mind about that. Go on about this man who picked you up."

She pouted at him. "There's not the slightest need to snub me," she said. "But if it is only the story you want— Well, I decided that he looked all right and that it wouldn't matter going in his car. So we got in and off we went. It was quite all right, there wasn't any knee-pressing or any of the things chaps do while their hands are on the steering-wheel, and he talked quite ordinarily about hiking and this part of Kent. Only after we had gone some miles, he suddenly said, 'You won't mind if I stop and pay a short call, will you? I've promised to leave a message at a friend's house before 9.15 and it is close on that now.'"

Cheviot said, "Oh, all this happened as late as that, did it?"

"Yes," she answered. "It was ten past nine. But it wasn't the time that mattered, it was this idea of stopping. It made me think I had been wrong about him, because that's how they always do it—unless there is a breakdown in a dark lane. So I said I thought I had better be getting on to the Youth Hostel and if he was going to stop I'd get out and walk."

"Well?"

"It didn't work," she said. "Of course, I had hardly expected it to, really. He just said something about it only taking a minute or two, and then there we were, off the road and up the drive of a house. This house, you see."

Cheviot said, "So that is how you come to be here?"

"It is how I got as far as the drive," she said. "But it is only the beginning of the story. What comes next is the part you won't believe."

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4

"I expect you'll wonder to start with," she said, "why I didn't jump out of the car when it stopped at the house, and run away. I wish now I had. Only—well, I think I must have been born under Pisces, because I am always torn both ways. One half of me kept saying 'Run, you little idiot, while you can,' and the other half said, 'No, it is all right, bound to be all right, and you don't want to make a fool of yourself.'"

Cheviot said, "I am not so much concerned with your reasons as with what you did."

"I thought I ought to explain it all," she retorted. "But just as you like. Well, at first he left me in the car while he went into the house. And——"

"Just a minute," said Cheviot. "How did he get into the house? With a latchkey?"

"Oh. I hadn't thought of that. Yes, I suppose so. Anyhow, he seemed to go practically straight in—I mean he didn't seem to wait for someone to answer a bell."

"With a latchkey, then. That places him definitely, doesn't it?"

She said, "Oh well, if you know who he was—— Because I don't. But anyway, after a few minutes—and while I was still arguing with myself, even if you don't want to hear about it—he came back and said, 'You are invited in. Mrs. Chisholm is a bit of an invalid and can't come out. But she won't hear of you sitting here alone.'"

" 'Mrs. Chisholm?' "

"That's what he said. I supposed that was the name of his friend. And if you know what I mean, it made it all

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seem more genuine, somehow, so that I wasn't nearly so suspicious. I did argue a bit, saying I thought he was only leaving a message: but he said Yes, that was so, only the message was for Mrs. Chisholm's daughter and she was out but expected back in ten minutes, so he wanted to wait for her. If I didn't much mind, he said. Only the question was whether I was going to wait outside or inside. Just as I liked, he said, only it was warmer inside and Mrs. Chisholm was making me some coffee."

Cheviot said, "Well?" He was struggling very hard to keep an open mind about this girl, until they came to something which would show him definitely whether she was telling lies or the truth.

"As you don't want me to talk about my arguments with myself," she said, "I can only tell you that I eventually decided that it was all right and perfectly genuine. So I went into the house with him. He took me into the sitting-room and we sat down and talked. There wasn't the least thing wrong—I mean he didn't get fresh at all. Only after a bit it struck me as odd that there wasn't any sign of Mrs. Chisholm. I mean she was taking a terribly long time over making that coffee. Then, as if he had seen what I was thinking, he said he would go and find her. So he went away, and—well, that was the last I've seen of him."

Cheviot said, "Oh come! You can't expect me to accept that. Or do you mean the last you saw of him alive? You were in his room when you screamed."

She stared at him.

"Oh no, no!" she cried. "It wasn't that man. Not the man who was killed."

"Now look here," said Cheviot. "It was Mr. Thornton who was killed, and this story of yours only makes sense if it was he who brought you to the house. The point I made

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about the latchkey shows it was he. And anyway, there is no one else whom it could have been."

"But it wasn't," she cried. "The man who brought me here was younger and he had a moustache, whereas the man who was killed was clean-shaven and elderly. They just weren't the slightest bit alike."

5

She had told him at the beginning that he would find her story unbelievable. Like this, it certainly was that. You didn't pick up a girl on the public highway and take her "for the usual purposes" to somebody else's house. If you had some innocent purpose in mind—but what on earth could that be?—you didn't have to trick her with stories about a non-existent "Mrs. Chisholm." And if, for one purpose or another, you wanted to enter someone else's house, you didn't have a latchkey, you wouldn't know that most of the occupants would be out on a particular evening—and anyway you wouldn't walk out after a few minutes and leave the girl behind you!

So this part of the girl's story, at least, was definitely a lie.

And the reason for the lie seemed pretty obvious. If she had been picked up by Thornton for immoral purposes, and then resented his proposals and had killed him in the midst of her struggles—and had been caught almost red-handed by the return of his family—she had only two possible lines of defence. She could plead self-defence—but that would only reduce a murder charge to one of manslaughter; or she could tell a story about "a strange man" who had brought her to the house, and deny that she had

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ever seen Thornton before she found him dead. And there wouldn't be much doubt which would seem the more promising of those two—provided she could carry it off.

It showed how easily you could be deceived by appearances. This girl had had three hours, during the silence of Constable Wilson, in which to recover her poise after what she had done, to think up a good story and to practice an effective manner of telling it. And here it was. Even that preliminary remark that he would find it incredible would have been part of the cunning. . . . Cheviot remembered a doctor who had dealt with a "difficult" patient by saying "I know you are one of those people who never take advice," and then had produced the advice, knowing that the patient would have to accept it in order to repudiate that unwelcome accusation. This could be the same trick: he could have been warned that he would find it difficult to believe, in order that he should subconsciously show his breadth of mind by believing it! Only that had hardly worked, when she produced that obvious lie. Nor, of course, would it work over the other lies which no doubt she was now about to tell.

6

Therefore he said, in a much more harsh tone than he had yet used to her, "Very well. I have noted what you say. Now tell me the rest."

"I waited," she said, in a tone which he now realized was merely dramatic. "I just waited and waited. At first, I was expecting him back every minute, either with Mrs. Chisholm and the coffee or alone. Only he didn't come.

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Nothing happened at all. And suddenly it struck me that there was a 'dead' feeling about the place; if you know what I mean: the feeling you get when you are alone in an empty house."

Cheviot said, "H'm. Well, it wasn't an empty house, at any rate. Apart from Mr. Thornton, there was the house-keeper in her room upstairs."

"I am only saying what it felt like to me," she retorted. "I daresay I only felt it because there was such complete silence."

"You say you heard nothing at all?"

"Only once, when there was a loud crash, as if someone was falling through a skylight."

Cheviot said, "Oh yes. The broken window. You say you don't know who did that?"

"I didn't know a window was broken," she answered. "I mean I didn't know it was a window, I only heard a crash."

"What time was that?"

"Oh, I don't know. It must have been about half an hour after I came here."

"Shortly before 10 o'clock, then. All right. Go on with what you have to tell me."

"Well, after a bit I couldn't stand it any longer. The silence and everything, I mean. So I got up and went to look for someone. Only then I got a shock, because when I came in the hall lights had been on, and now, apart from the light from the sitting-room, the whole place was in complete darkness. It was just frightfully uncanny, and more like an empty house than ever."

She stopped and looked at Cheviot in a way which made him feel—now that he so strongly suspected her—that she was calculating how much he could be expected to take.

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"It was then that I really began to feel frightened," she went on. "Because there wouldn't have been any point in turning off the lights unless I was going to be in for trouble. I mean, there wouldn't, would there?"

"I wouldn't know at all," said Cheviot. "But I believe they turn off the lights on the stage when the heroine is going to get more than she bargained for. No doubt you've seen that kind of play?"

"Not very often," she answered. "I prefer musical shows and revues. But I do wish you wouldn't interrupt with things that have nothing to do with it. Where was I? Oh yes. Well, I wanted to have the lights on again more than anything, so I went to look for the switch. Only somehow I got astray in the darkness and ran into the front door. And while I was fumbling about, because the switch ought to have been close to the door, I found that the chain was up. And—well, that made me try something else, and I found that the door was bolted top and bottom!"

It sounded, Cheviot decided, as if she had momentarily gone back to the truth. Mr. Thornton would have seen the advantage of a bolted front door, to cause a little delay if his children came back before he expected them.

"That terrified me more than anything, just for a minute," the girl went on. "Being locked in, in that darkness, I mean. I nearly screamed. Only I suppose I am fairly level-headed really, so I soon saw that I wasn't locked in, it was other people who were locked out. But that didn't help much. It must have been done so that there wouldn't be interruptions while—while he was doing things to me."

Cheviot said, "You are working up the horrors a bit, aren't you? Still, I don't mind. Let's put it this way. Do you agree that you realized that you had been lured to

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an apparently empty house and that there could be only one reason for that? And that you were panic-stricken about it? And also that you did not mean to let anything disastrous happen without making a struggle? Is it fair to put it like that?"

"Except that I didn't imagine struggling would be much use," she said. "My idea was to get away as quickly as I could, while I still had the chance. If he gave me time to get the door undone, that is. All I wanted was to grab my rucksack—I had left that in the car when I came in, you see—and run away."

She paused. Cheviot wondered whether it was the sense of drama again, or whether she was making up a bit more. Then she said, "Only when I got out onto the drive, the car wasn't there! It had vanished completely. And my rucksack had gone with it."

She was being quite terribly ingenious, Cheviot thought. After that stabbing, there would have been bloodstains on her clothing. She would have had to do a quick change, into spare clothes taken from her rucksack, and then the bloodstained garments had to disappear. Without a doubt, she would have shoved them into the rucksack and then have dropped it down the nearest well—if there was one—or have hidden it under some bushes. Well, there would be another job to keep Sergeant Kimber out of his bed to-night.

"And then?" he said.

She hesitated—as well she might. It must have been quite a strain, making up all this story. "It is so difficult," she said, "if I mayn't explain how I worked things out. But—well, I decided that he must have gone, taking the car with him. I couldn't see any point in that—absolutely none at all—but that is what it looked like."

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Cheviot said, "Did it really? If he had gone out of the house and driven the car away, and not come back, how had he managed to leave the bolts shot on the inside of the door?"

She said, "Oh! I hadn't thought of that."

"Everybody makes mistakes," he said. "It is by spotting them that people like me do our jobs. Now supposing we get down to things. Apart from your story, the only certain fact is that you were in this house at 11 o'clock, beside Mr. Thornton's dead body. This mysterious man, who you say was not Mr. Thornton, hasn't been seen by you or anybody else since about 9.30, and there is no evidence, apart from what you tell me, that he ever existed. On the other hand, parts of your story are consistent and credible—that is to say, they would be if the man concerned were Mr. Thornton. So again I put it to you that that is who he was."

"Oh dear," she cried. "I told you you wouldn't believe me."

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Cheviot shrugged his shoulders. "Then you had better go on," he said, "and give me your version of how you came to be upstairs."

"I suppose you won't believe that either," she retorted. "But I stopped being afraid, when I thought the man wasn't there any longer, and—well, I thought that perhaps if I waited a little somebody would turn up and explain things. You see, it looked as if that door being bolted on the inside must mean that somebody was expected. So—so I went indoors again and found the hall light-switch. That

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made everything look a lot better. And then I did some exploring. I found the kitchen first—oh, and I felt the coffee percolator and it was quite cold, which seemed to make it certain that there had never been any Mrs. Chisholm. Though in that case I just couldn't think why the man had talked about her. Nor, for that matter, what it was all about, anyhow, and why I had been brought there and then left. You do see that, don't you?"

"Oh, indeed I do," said Cheviot. "Without wanting to criticize your story-telling, I must say that this bit of it is frightfully thin. But if, on the other hand, the man was Mr. Thornton——"

"Oh dear," she cried, "you are onto that again!"

"It is the only feasible explanation. Still, you had better go on."

"There isn't much else," she said. "When I was in the kitchen, I made myself some coffee—not having had any supper, you know—and stole a few biscuits. Then I went on exploring, upstairs. And there—there I found him. Oh, it was horrible—simply most utterly horrible."

Cheviot said, "Oh yes. And you say he was dead, then?"

"Of course. I mean I was quite certain he was."

"Horrible for you. Naturally you screamed."

"I couldn't help it."

"And yet you had time to examine him, and to make sure that he was elderly and clean-shaven?"

"Oh!" she said. "But I didn't 'examine' him, I just saw that, all in a flash, and remembered it afterwards."

"I see," said Cheviot. "And you definitely tell me you had never seen him before that moment?"

"No, never, never," she said.

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It was now all fairly clear, except for one or two snags. Of course, there were snags at first in every case, and the interesting part of detection was getting over them.

The main trouble here was the housekeeper's evidence. The time between about 9.15 and 11 could not have been spent by Thornton and the girl in the room next to hers: she would have been bound to hear something. But if that hour had been spent in another room—a bedroom, for example—how, at the end of it, had Thornton persuaded the girl to come into the study? And why?

Then, where and when had the girl picked up the knife?

Why, if that hour had been spent in the way that seemed probable, and she had resented it, had she not used the knife earlier, in whatever room she had then been in?

And—above all, perhaps—why, after disposing of the rucksack full of bloodstained clothing, had she not immediately fled? Why had she missed that easy chance of a get-away and taken the risk of staying on in the house, with the dead body of her victim?

9

Well, he would have to get down to those points at the earliest possible moment. And meanwhile the girl must obviously be detained. There was hardly enough evidence at the moment for an arrest, but——

He said, "I shall have to detain you, pending further enquiries. You will have to go to the local police station."

"Oh no," she cried. "I wouldn't like that at all. Besides,

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what on earth is it for? I know you don't believe what I've told you, but even then——"

"This is a case of murder," said Cheviot. "You were beside the corpse, and you can give no credible explanation of how you came to be there. So I have no choice in the matter."

"Oh, good Lord," she cried. "You aren't thinking that I murdered him, are you?"

CHAPTER THREE

ACCUSATION

1

WHEN Constable Wilson had taken the girl away, Cheviot went in search of Sergeant Kimber. "Well?" he said. "Any discoveries?"

"Not a lot that helps, sir. Though that may depend on what line you are on, of course. There's oceans of prints all over the hall, though we can't say whose they are, not having been able to take anybody's yet. There's four men's and three women's sets. Maybe they'll tell us something later, sir, but I should say not. There's everybody's everywhere, as you might say."

"It's hardly worth while bothering about that," said Cheviot. "I'm pretty clear now about how the girl got into the house. What is more important is where she spent the first hour or so after she came. Anything on that?"

Sergeant Kimber said, "Not yet, sir. Been too busy on other jobs." He said it quite civilly. It was his role—and that of every other detective-sergeant, come to that—to work for hours on something and then to find it wasn't wanted after all.

"Get to it when you can," said Cheviot. "You can find Miss Jones's prints as well as Miss Thornton's in that little room, and then you can take Miss Thornton's in her bedroom and eliminate hers, leaving you with Miss Jones's. Not just now, though," he added with a half-smile. "Miss Thornton has gone to bed with a sleeping draught, and if Dr. Hadly hasn't made it a strong one, the shock might be bad for her: if she woke up and found you by her bed-

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side, I mean. So the morning will do for that. Now, what about the knife?"

"Nothing doing, sir. I've tried it on Miss Corley and Mr. Peter Thornton, and they both say it doesn't belong here: they've neither of them ever seen it before, they say."

"Really?" said Cheviot. He had not expected that. "What sort of knife is it?"

"A sort of stiletto, foreign make. Wop, I expect. Not likely to be used for anything except in a fight."

It was disconcerting. It was not in the least likely that a girl on a hike would carry a stiletto; or, come to that, that the sort of girl who would carry a stiletto on a hike—if there was one—would readily allow herself to be "picked up" and then use the stiletto when she got what she must have expected she would get. And yet, if the stiletto didn't belong in the house, surely the girl must have brought it with her?

Of course, there was no reason to believe that this Miss Jones was on a hike at all: that was only part of her own story, which consisted mostly of lies, anyway. But if she wasn't on a hike, what was she doing? Would that have to mean that she had not been picked up by Thornton, but had come to his house deliberately, stiletto in hand, for the express purpose of murdering him? And in that case, *why*—what had been her motive? And could it have been just by luck that she chose a night when his children were out? And—worse still, perhaps—how in that case did she get in?

No, that would hardly do. She must have been brought to the house by Mr. Thornton. And presumably she must have had the knife with her.

Really, it was a terrible nuisance about that knife. It spoilt what had had all the makings of an easy case.

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2

For a few hours, in the early morning, Cheviot slept on the sitting-room settee. But it was disturbed and restless sleep—disturbed by the flashing of torches outside the windows as Sergeant Kimber and a party of constables searched for Miss Jones's rucksack and bloodstained clothing, and restless because of his own troubled mind.

By the time the dawn came, he had an entirely new idea.

Mr. Thornton, he now decided, had picked up the girl and brought her home for his own purposes; he had taken her into the sitting-room, as she said, and had spent some minutes with her there, summoning up courage—perhaps because he wasn't used to that kind of thing—for making his proposals to her; then either the courage hadn't come or he had thought better of the whole business—perhaps he hadn't realized till then she was an innocent girl in that respect—and he had left her, on the excuse of looking for the non-existent "Mrs. Chisholm"—perhaps he had not quite known how, in those circumstances, you got rid of an only half-uninvited guest without being downright offensive. Anyhow, he had left her, and had gone upstairs to his study; and there he had been stabbed to death—not by Miss Jones, but by someone else who was lying in wait for him. Then the murderer had crept downstairs, found Thornton's car on the drive and driven away in it. After that, the girl had behaved as she had related, eventually going upstairs and finding the stabbed body. And when she had to account for things, she saw her own danger and produced the lie about it not having been Thornton who picked her up—that might have seemed the only way to escape from her predicament.

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All that seemed reasonable enough—an excellent working theory—and Cheviot rolled off the settee feeling fairly pleased about it. But when he had washed his face in cold water, it hardly looked so good: it did not account either for the broken window or for the fact that, after the car had gone, the door had been found chained and bolted. Nor for the silence during the stabbing.

Of course, the bolted door might have been an embellishment invented by Miss Jones, with her dramatic sense, as she had probably invented the turned-off lights and other things. But the broken window? And the silence?

Cheviot scrubbed at his face vigorously with a rough towel and decided that, in spite of the snags, he would start with that as a working theory. One had to start somewhere.

3

Having decided on that, Cheviot next made a list of the points which, whether they immediately appeared as snags or not, he had specially to watch out for and deal with:

- (1). The knife: where did it come from?
- (2). The window: who broke it and why?
- (3). The door: why was it bolted and how?
- (4). Bloodstained clothing.
- (5). The murderer's means of entry.
- (6). The silence from Thornton's room.

Certainly, it was a formidable list. This case was not going to be so simple, after all.

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4

Cheviot had^o hardly finished that, when Sergeant Kimber came in—looking like a man who had toiled hard and fruitlessly all night. Also, he was dirty from grovelling under bushes, and his hands were scratched by brambles.

"There's not a bl—— there's not a thing, sir," he said. "We've been through the garden, outhouses, garage and everywhere. There's not a rucksack, or any clothing with blood on it, anywhere."

"Oh well, never mind," said Cheviot. "It doesn't matter. I have decided now that Miss Jones didn't do this murder. I don't know who did, yet, but whoever he was, he stole Mr. Thornton's car and drove away in it, taking the rucksack with him. And of course the bloodstains were on his clothes: he'll have changed when he got home."

Sergeant Kimber only said, "Oh." Even when weary and dirty—and very, very thirsty—he was a remarkably well-disciplined police officer: but he was also human, even if Cheviot did not recognize the fact, and therefore it was with much satisfaction that he added, "But neither the murderer nor anyone else has stolen Mr. Thornton's car and driven away in it. I got the number from Mr. Peter, earlier on, in case it came in useful, and that car is in the garage now. So unless the murderer only took it for a bit of fun, and then brought it back—— Afraid you've got things a bit wrong there, sir."

5

It was another check of course: and yet it did not necessarily amount to so very much. If Mr. Thornton had

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used his car for picking up Miss Jones, he certainly would not want his children, when they returned, to find it in the drive and ask him where he had been in it. So he would have been in a hurry to put it back in the garage—and particularly so, perhaps, if by that time he had a sense of rectitude over having resisted temptation!

But even if that was all right, there was still a lot that wasn't—difficulties that still had to be dealt with. Though Mr. Thornton could have bolted the door after putting away the car, there did not appear to be the slightest reason why he should have done so. Nor was there any explanation of the broken window. And anyway, who was the murderer?

Well, the most probable murderer, on the evidence so far—if Miss Jones was ruled out—was Dudley Perm. So the enquiry could go on, now, on the assumption that *he* was guilty.

Cheviot accordingly walked to the address Perm had given him. There was always the chance that a visit like that would be unexpected, and in that case it might be more effective than one with a search-warrant.

Dudley himself answered the bell. "Oh, hello," he said. "You're early."

"You said you'd be going out. Mind if I come in for a chat?"

The man obviously hesitated. Then he said, "I've only a bed-sitt, and she hasn't done the bed yet. Besides, she won't like my bringing anyone in at this hour."

"Oh, you have to stand up to landladies," said Cheviot. "They are an obnoxious tribe. I've endured them for years and the only technique is to be firm with them. Let's go in, shall we?"

As Dudley made no more demur, they entered a small

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room on the ground floor. It was extremely untidy, and Cheviot decided that Nancy Thornton would have a painful training job. If Perm wasn't convicted as a murderer instead of going to the altar, of course.

The most noticeable thing amid all the litter was that the wash basin (hot and cold) had not even a soap ring. If bloodstained clothing has been washed there within the last seven or eight hours, no traces had been left.

Dudley said, "Excuse me, you know, but what's the idea of your coming here? I don't mind, of course, apart from what the old Raddle will say, but I would like to know what it's all about. Are you imagining that I killed old Thornton?"

"You are a possible suspect," said Cheviot.

"Oh well, if you say so. But actually it is the last thing I'd have wanted to do. You see, Nancy is jolly keen on her father—quite a staggering example of filial affection, in fact—and I really don't think she'd have wanted to marry me if I'd killed him."

"You would presumably have expected to get away with it. You would have counted on her faith in you——"

"But if I had expected to get away with it," retorted Dudley, with rather surprising logic, "I'd have been cleverer and more cunning than you seem to think I've been, and I wouldn't have left bloodstains—or whatever you are looking for—in my bedroom. Well, I really don't see that you can have it both ways."

Cheviot said—perhaps because he was a little peeved, as he always was when people turned his logic against him—"Am I expected to take your innocence for granted because you make a remark like that?"

"You might think it had that way, if you stopped to work it out," said Dudley. "I rather think you are count-

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ing on my being a perfect ass. But I'm not, really. That's only the effect of my manner. You see, I get by with quite a lot of scoops in my business, when the more pushing fellows are turned down, simply by pretending to be a simpleton. It is no end of a good technique and pays awfully well. The trouble is that it becomes quite a habit, and I am inclined to use it in my private life as well as in business. For about three months Nancy thought me a complete simp and wouldn't look at me. And I daresay it is not so good, either, when there is someone around who is inclined to suspect people of murder."

Cheviot said, "All right, Mr. Perm. Then henceforth I will take it that you are an intelligent fellow, and cunning, and quite smart enough to have done this murder in a way that would give me a lot of trouble to convict you."

"M'm," said Dudley. "I suppose that is the alternative. But on the whole I think I prefer it to having my intelligence underrated. Of course I didn't murder Thornton, but that is certainly how I would have done it if I had. Now, you needn't bother about not having a search-warrant. Go ahead and look for what you want to find. Look anywhere you like, and don't mind me in the least."

With an uncomfortable feeling that he was being made a fool of, if not actually laughed at, Cheviot searched the room very thoroughly. He found nothing.

6

When at last that was finished, Dudley said, "Waste of time, wasn't it? Well, I don't suppose you'll drop the idea just because of that, so can I give you any practical help? I suppose the idea is that I slipped away from the Village Hall last night, cut old Thornton's throat, and dodged

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back without being missed. But I think you'll find that there was a caretaker chap who had me under his eye, because I'm not a member of the Theatrical Society and I don't go to the church, and generally I am a low fellow—being a journalist—and therefore quite likely to steal the curtains. So perhaps he'll give me an alibi."

"Quite so," said Cheviot. "I'll be making my own enquiries, Mr. Perm."

"Oh, I'm all for the lone hand," said Dudley. "I take all the tips I can get, pretending I'm not listening, you know, and then I slip out on my own and act on 'em. I gather you do the same thing. Now, what else can I do for you? Has it occurred to you that if I had done the murder that way I should be sunk if my alibi wasn't cast-iron? And—now you know I'm not quite a fool—that I'd have the sense to know that? Because the alibi almost certainly won't be as good as that, without any loopholes: I mean, the caretaker won't swear he watched me every minute, all through the evening, and anyway he probably slipped out to get a drink, like a sensible chap, before closing-time. You see the argument, don't you? Either I really am a fool, or else I didn't do the murder. Not that way, anyhow. And I hadn't a chance any other way."

Cheviot did not answer. He disliked Dudley Perm very much: but unfortunately that didn't provide proof that the man was a murderer.

He walked back to the Thorntons' house alone, leaving Dudley presumably to set off in his car in search of semi-nude actresses. He then sent a constable to fetch Miss Jones from the cells: he could not detain her indefinitely. Indeed, he had no justification now for detaining her at all, since he was no longer suspecting her. But she was still a leading character in this drama, and she hadn't told the truth. Therefore he would be stymied if he let her disap-

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pear, so that he could not immediately find her if he wanted her again: and if she continued her hike, without fixed addresses, that might cause him a lot of bother. So perhaps for another day or so—— But then he would have to put up a show as if the “pending enquiries” were in actual progress. Even if they did not now lead anywhere.

Peter and Nancy Thornton were up and about but uncommunicative: that is to say, Nancy was a shock-victim, and Peter was the big protective brother. Not that Cheviot wanted anything from either of them, just at the moment. The housekeeper was being very busy, either because that was her nature or because she had decided that work was a better cure for shock-effects than the smelling salts. Sergeant Kimber had gone to his bed at last, and a fresh set of detective-constables was standing by, waiting for Cheviot's orders.

He decided that there were far too many mysteries in this case. Almost certainly, some of them would prove to be quite independent of the murder, and it would simplify matters a lot if those could be eliminated. For instance, that window might have been broken out of mischief or spite by a small boy with a stone: and Miss Corley might really be a little deaf, even if she didn't know it or wouldn't admit it,

With that thought in his mind, Cheviot went into the kitchen. He noted with interest that the housekeeper heard his footsteps as he came along the passage, for she said as soon as he appeared, “Oh, it's you. I knew that wasn't Mr. Peter, because he always whistles. Though I suppose he mightn't this morning, being all of a heap and not wanting his breakfast. Now what do you want?”

“I am still very much puzzled by your not having heard anything unusual last night. The most likely explanation of that would have been that Mr. Thornton left his room

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during the evening and didn't come back to it until just before he was killed: and as a matter of fact I think I could find some support for that idea. But against that, there is your statement that you did hear some sounds, but nothing unusual. Now, can you make that a bit clearer? What sort of sounds did you hear? Was it as if he was moving about the room?"

"Oh, he wasn't dancing jigs," she said. "It wasn't like that. But I heard him coming up with his supper, just after half past eight, as I told you."

"Yes, yes," said Cheviot, "but I don't think that is what you were referring to. You told me about that separately. If I can remember your exact words—and I've a good memory for this kind of thing—you said, 'Of course, now you mention it, I did hear sounds but nothing unusual and I didn't pay any attention.' So you see I am anxious to know just what those sounds were."

"Oh," she said. "Well, it's difficult to say. There was a sort of bang, as if he was shutting a drawer."

"Only the one bang?"

"Well, no, if it comes to that. A bit as if he shut a lot of drawers, going through them all, looking for something. But I can't say for sure. It might not have been drawers: it might have been him stumping about."

"But you said last night that there was nothing to suggest that anyone was moving in his room."

"Did I? Oh well, I don't know. It's difficult to tell, isn't it, when you aren't noticing, not being interested."

"Anyhow, you heard something. What time was this?"

"Oh. Latish. I wasn't watching the clock, so I wouldn't know."

"That's unfortunate. It might help me a great deal if you could fix the time of those sounds."

"I can't though. Latish. That's all I can tell you."

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"I see," said Cheviot. "And how about sounds from outside the house? A car going down the drive, for instance, at about 9, and coming back, possibly, half an hour or so later?"

"Not to notice," she said. "I can hear cars on the road, and I don't notice one from t'other."

"But surely a car in the drive, just below your window, would sound different from one on the road?"

She shook her head. "Then I didn't hear anything."

"Nor the car being run into the garage, probably about 10 o'clock?"

"No."

"Extraordinary that you have heard so little," said Cheviot. "How about the smashing of the window? You must have heard that."

"Well, I did and I didn't. If you know what I mean. I did hear a crash, but it wasn't right on top of me, so to speak—or didn't sound it, anyway—and I thought it was something out in the road, so I didn't bother."

"Still, you heard it. When?"

"Oh, that would have been fairly early. Soon after Mr. Thornton came up."

"What, soon after half past eight? Surely not? Wasn't it more than an hour later than that?"

"I wouldn't have thought so. No, I'm fairly sure it wasn't. But I don't know, not keeping count of every minute, as they say."

It was all very unsatisfactory, Cheviot decided. When he had talked to her in her room, the night before, he had noticed a large alarm clock on her mantelpiece, facing her chair. But it meant nothing to her, apparently, except when she had to get up in the morning.

And yet, as far as it went—and the statement certainly

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was not very definite—what she was now saying might be taken as ruling the broken window right out of the case. If she had really heard the crash soon after 8.30 that was a full hour before—— But no. She was definitely wrong there, of course. For Miss Jones had heard it too, just after 9.30; and she had referred to the sound without any prompting. So it meant that you just couldn't attach any importance to Miss Corley's statements, at any rate as regarded the time things had happened. Still, it was a great pity that the times could not be tied down just a little. He said, "When you let yourself doze off, you must have looked at the clock to make sure it wasn't late enough for Miss Nancy and Mr. Peter to come home. So I suppose we can fix that time at least?"

"I remember 10 o'clock," she answered, "because it's the last the church clock strikes before they turn it off for the night. And it's a blessing they do, I must say, or I wouldn't get a wink."

"Very well," said Cheviot. "And was it before or after 10 by the church clock that you heard the bangs from Mr. Thornton's room?"

"After," she said.

"Well, that's something," said Cheviot. "So if I suggest that he was out of his room between 9 and 10, you have nothing against that?"

"N—no," she said. She sounded a little unwilling about it, but probably she was a person who did not like being tied down to anything. "No, not by what I heard—didn't hear, I mean. I just wouldn't know. But if he went down after his supper he came up again later, and it was all very quiet till he made those bangs in his room. Looking for something, I daresay."

DOUBLY DEAD

7

When he left Miss Corley and returned to the hall, Cheviot found Dr. Hadly there.

"Oh, good morning, Inspector. I've just looked in to see my young friends. How are they? They'll be having a very bad time, I'm afraid. I don't suppose there is much I can do, but they'll want someone around. I shan't be in your way if I talk to them in the sitting-room?"

"I am using Miss Nancy's study as my office," said Cheviot.

He went there and waited impatiently for Miss Jones. When she came she was indignant.

"I'm sure you've no right to be keeping me locked up like this," she cried. "I didn't particularly mind being at the police station, because it was quite an experience, really, and I'm all for adventures. But just look at me! No comb to do my hair—because I didn't care for the old one they offered me—and absolutely nothing to put on my face. And not even a clean handkerchief, because all my things are in the rucksack. You haven't found it yet, I suppose?"

"That is one of the many points on which the story you told me doesn't fit in with the facts," said Cheviot. "You said the car had been driven away with your rucksack in it. But actually the car was only put into the garage—and the rucksack was not there!"

"The car was in the garage—the garage of this house?" she cried, as if she was not so much interested in her rucksack after all. "But—but I don't follow that in the least. How do you know it was the same car? I mean, how do you know the car in the garage is the one I came here in?"

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Cheviot said, "Now, look here, Miss Jones. I've told you before that your story only makes sense if the man who brought you here was Mr. Thornton. It is his car that is in the garage." She was beginning to protest: but he went on, "You realize that it is because I don't believe you on this point that I am detaining you? You realize that my belief that you are telling me lies might eventually form the basis of a charge of murder against you?" It was necessary to frighten her: so he said again, very impressively, "A charge of murder!"

She did not appear to be frightened at all. She said, "But that is utterly ridiculous! I suppose you are trying to scare me, but you can't do it that way. Anyway, I don't believe you mean it: you couldn't, it is too completely absurd. I keep telling you that I never saw Mr. Thornton in my life till I found him dead."

If he couldn't frighten her, he would have to cajole her. It meant rather a sudden change of line, but he was confident that he could manage that all right.

So he suddenly smiled at her. "You are not the sort of girl that even the police can put the wind up!" he said. "All right: so much the better. It shows you have intelligence and character. So I'll be frank with you. As a matter of fact, I don't think you did murder Mr. Thornton. But for all that, I do think you are telling me certain lies. I think you are more afraid than you are prepared to admit and I imagine you have seen for some time that a charge of murder isn't out of the question, in the predicament you are in. I daresay a night at the police station has made you see, more than ever, that you have to protect yourself, and your only idea for doing so is to stick to this story that you didn't see Mr. Thornton till he was dead. But in your own interests I must warn you that you are running fearful risks by doing that. Honestly, I do advise you to come clean

DOUBLY DEAD

about the business, Miss Jones, and I am sure if you consulted a solicitor—as you are entitled to do, you know—he would say the same thing. Now, would you like to have a few minutes alone to think this over? I am sure you will realize then——”

“I suppose that is terribly clever of you,” she said, “but it doesn’t make the least difference. What I have told you is absolutely true, and I can’t say anything different. And after all, I ought to know: I saw the man who brought me here, and you didn’t.”

Feeling more than a little exasperated, Cheviot said, “You cannot even give me a detailed description of him. ‘A man of medium age with a moustache’—that isn’t very exact, is it? Actually, it rules out the only other men who come into this case, Peter Thornton and Dudley Perm, but——”

“Oh don’t be silly,” she cried. “Of course it wasn’t either of them!”

“Then we agree on one point, anyhow. But we are back on this story of a mysterious stranger who cannot be produced!”

She said, “Wait a minute. Who is that, outside in the hall? A man—I heard his voice. I am almost sure—I remember the voice perfectly. That’s the man who brought me here!”

Cheviot jumped to his feet and pulled open the door. In the hall were Peter Thornton and Dr. Hadly. The doctor was saying, “Well, good-bye, Peter, my boy. Your best job at the moment is to look after Nancy. You’ll help yourself that way, too.”

From behind Cheviot’s shoulder, Miss Jones cried, “Yes, that is the man. I am absolutely certain of it—I’d know him anywhere by his voice.”

Cheviot said, “Oh, that’s ridiculous. You’ve told me all

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along that the man had a moustache. You can see for yourself that Dr. Hadly is clean-shaven."

"I can't help that," she cried. "Perhaps he put one on, a false one, by way of a disguise. Anyhow, I'd know him anywhere. It is the same shaped head, and—and—oh, everything is exactly the same. And the voice particularly." She turned excitedly to the doctor. "It was you who brought me here last night. You did, didn't you?"

In astonishment, Dr. Hadly looked first at her and then at Cheviot.

"I'm sorry," he said; "I don't understand. Am I supposed to have met this young lady before? I certainly haven't. I've a good memory for faces, and I am certain I have never set eyes on her."

CHAPTER FOUR

DEATH COMES TOO SOON

1

OF course, it was perfectly absurd. There was no reason why the girl should have picked on Dr. Hadly for her ridiculous accusation, except that he was the first man to come within her hearing after she had become acutely frightened. There had just been that remark of "a mysterious stranger who can't be produced"—and she had immediately produced one. Of course any man would have served her purpose at that moment.

But in spite of appearances, she *had* been frightened: even more so than he had really intended her to be. And what could that mean, except that she was guilty?

After sending Miss Jones back to the police station—despite her renewed protests—Cheviot sat for some time and thought about this new position. A little while ago, he had accepted the idea of the girl's innocence—at any rate as far as murder was concerned. That had been principally on account of the difficulty about the stiletto. He had been hasty about that, running away from a difficult snag. Well, he wouldn't do that again. The snags would have to be got over, fitted into the true picture. For there could not be any doubt now. Nobody would flounder like that who wasn't guilty—no fish would thrash the water so wildly unless the hook was well and truly in.

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2

Very well, then. As a preliminary to getting proof of her guilt, that snag must now be dealt with. And one or two others as well, of course, including the broken window.

To trace the stiletto to her, he would have to go to her home. He had not bothered to ask her for her address: well, he would have to get it now.

But on the way out of the house he ran into Peter Thornton, who said, "I say, what on earth was all that about Uncle Charles?"

"I am afraid," said Cheviot, "that that is the kind of thing that happens when a girl loses her head."

"I couldn't make out what she meant," said Peter. "She seemed to think she had met him before, somewhere."

"What the accusation amounts to is that Dr. Hadly came here last night while you were out, between 9.15 and 10. That is all the girl has said about him so far, except that he picked her up at a cross-roads somewhere or other and brought her here. But I expect when the screw is turned a bit tighter there will be more: I think she will try to make out that it was Dr. Hadly who murdered your father."

"What!" Peter's head jerked up and he stared at Cheviot, half in surprise, half in indignation. "Uncle Charles murdered Dad? What utter, absolute rot! Oh, it is absolutely impossible, still, to believe any of it—that anyone could have murdered Dad, I mean—but even if that is possible, this isn't. Uncle Charles—good Lord!"

Cheviot said, "I wasn't taking it seriously, you know."

"I should think not. As if anyone possibly could, for an instant! But that girl oughtn't to be allowed to say such things. It—it is really pretty foul, isn't it?"

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"Oh, definitely," said Cheviot. He did not want to linger about with Peter Thornton—he wanted to get busy on his case. The tracing of the stiletto would mean a trip to some part of London, probably, and would take him all day. He really could not spare the time for what to him was only idle chat—even if it was a lot more than that to Peter.

A few months ago—before Kathleen came into his life—he would just have snubbed the boy and walked off. It was only because things were so different now, and he didn't want to hurt people—at any rate people who were not his suspects at the moment—more than necessary, that he stayed for a few moments, hoping to be able to slide away without downright snubbing.

"I never heard such nonsense," Peter was saying. "You know, Uncle Charles is practically one of the family; he drops in whenever he feels like it, has a latchkey to the house, as a matter of fact, and we don't even say 'How do you do?' to him. It is always super to see him, and——"

Cheviot's attention had been wandering, but he caught six words out of that.

He said, "I meant to ask you about that. Who else has a latchkey? You and your sister, of course—your father would have had one, and the housekeeper, I suppose—and now you say Dr. Hadly had one. Anyone else?"

"No, no one else. There were four originally, and we had an extra one cut for Uncle Charles."

"I see," said Cheviot.

3

Of course that was coincidence, just a bit of luck for Janet Jones. But for all that it was a nuisance—her Coun-

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sel, when it came to the trial, would be able to make a lot of play with it.

No doubt Counsel would point out, too, that the fact that Mr. Thornton's car had been found in the garage might well mean that it had stayed there all the evening. No doubt he would say, at any rate as things stood at present, that there was not a shred of evidence to support the police contention that Thornton had been to those cross-roads in his car—and he would drop a hint to the jury, without at first putting too much stress on it, that as a doctor, Dr. Hadly would also have a car. Later, there would be a more considerable emphasis on the fact that Hadly had the only two possessions necessary for bringing Miss Jones into the house—a car and a latchkey.

Oh, confound it!

4

Cheviot told himself that he would have to pay a little more attention to Miss Jones's declared line of defence. Any suggestion that it could have been Dr. Hadly, and not Mr. Thornton, who picked her up at the cross-roads must be answered in advance.

It would be easy, of course: a doctor would be sure to have evening calls, and that would amount to an alibi.

Peter Thornton was still talking.

"If you ask me, something ought to be done about that girl, to prevent her saying things like that. Apart from it being quite ridiculous, it just isn't fair to Uncle Charles. I suppose you know how ready people are to talk in a town like this, the most frightfully malicious rumours get around. And there are always nasty people who say there's no smoke without fire—that kind of thing. Can't something be done about it?"

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"I don't see how it can get about," said Cheviot. "It was only said in front of you and me and Dr. Hadly, you know. By the by, I suppose Dr. Hadly didn't mention to you how he was going to spend last evening? As he took an hour off to come here at 6, I daresay he became pretty busy?"

"He'd have taken that hour, however busy he was. Uncle Charles is like that. If we ask him to do something, he'll always do it."

"Oh, then that visit was for something important?"

"Well, you see," said Peter, "he had volunteered to put in a word with Dad about my sister and Dudley. Actually, they've had several talks about it in the past three weeks, and this one was to be a bit crucial: Uncle Charles was pretty sure he would persuade Dad then."

Cheviot said, "Oh, I see." Then, a little reluctantly, but because such a continued series of coincidences might really be a little odd, he said, "Does that reference to 'several talks' about a matter which must certainly have aroused a good deal of feeling in your family mean that Dr. Hadly and your father had been having disagreements?"

"Oh well, hardly that," answered Peter. "No, no, not that at all. It was merely that Uncle Charles was backing Nancy, and Dad—well, couldn't agree."

"I see. That would be a disagreement, wouldn't it?" said Cheviot.

5

It was now looking more than "a little odd." Dr. Hadly was "a friend of the family" and particularly devoted to the two children. He had been on their side—on Nancy's side, anyway—in this dispute: a dispute which might possibly have had more violence in it than Peter Thornton

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cared to admit. Supposing Dr. Hadly had felt very strongly about it, very strongly indeed. Supposing—just for the sake of the argument—that as Nancy's doctor, being that as well as her uncle, he had known, but had not been willing to tell her father, that Nancy and Dudley had already overstepped the mark, so that it was imperative that she should be married to him within the next seven months or so, and the sooner the better. And supposing that John Thornton had remained obdurate in refusing a friendly consent—perhaps in insisting on a family break-up if a marriage took place against his wishes. And finally, supposing that Dr. Hadly did feel very, very strongly about it.

Well, there were flaws in that as a motive, of course: but weren't they the kind of flaws which looked stronger on paper than they were in fact? John Thornton could be like that, even if that kind of father was practically extinct; Nancy could be the sort of girl who wouldn't be happy in flouting her father, even to get a necessary husband; and Dr. Hadly could be a fanatical fairy-godmother, ready to commit even murder to right a wrong and secure the happiness of his protégé. It was possible.

But while that was all very fine as a bit of theorizing, and the murder might possibly be accounted for in that way, what about Janet Jones? You didn't normally bring an unnecessary spectator with you when you came to commit a murder! Nor, for that matter, did you needlessly break windows!

Still, it was a bit disconcerting, when he had thought he had a clear case against the girl, to find these points cropping up one after another, possibly in her favour. It would be much more satisfactory if they didn't. The position would be altogether happier if and when Dr. Hadly was finally ruled out.

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6

Cheviot therefore set out, at last, in search of the doctor. He went in his car, assuming that the man would be out on his rounds and would have to be pursued. He *was* out at that hour, but he had left a list of addresses where he could be contacted in cases of emergency; and Cheviot set off after him. He caught up with him twenty minutes later.

"Terribly sorry to interrupt the morning's work, doctor," he said, "but I am anxious to clear a little point without delay. I expect we agree that the girl in Thornton's house was talking utter nonsense, but——"

The doctor interrupted him.

"I am glad you agree on that point, anyway. Doctors are always coming up against neurotics who single them out for slanderous accusations. I don't quite know where the slander would lie in this instance, but I thought that girl had a wild look in her eye and I have been half expecting some trouble. What, exactly, was she getting at?"

"Her idea seems to be that at about 9 o'clock last night, or perhaps a few minutes earlier, you picked her up at a cross-roads, where you were apparently hanging about on the chance of getting someone, and gave her a lift in your car. You don't appear to have done anything ferocious to her, and you aren't accused of having made obscene suggestions, but——"

Dr. Hadly laughed without mirth. "Of course," he said. "There is always a sexual element in these charges. How far am I supposed to have gone, if I was neither obscene nor ferocious?"

"Not far at all, in that sort of way. She only accuses you of decoying her into your brother-in-law's house and leav-

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ing her there. But I fancy she is building up to the idea that you murdered Mr. Thornton."

"Oh, I see," said Dr. Hadly. "The usual sex charge, adapted to more practical purposes. That's not altogether uncommon, you know, though it implies a rather more dangerous mental state. Does it mean that she killed poor John herself, and now wants me as a scapegoat?"

"It might mean that," Cheviot answered, cautiously, "But as the accusation has been made——"

"Oh, you are taking it seriously enough to want my answer, are you? That's all right, I don't mind a bit. The answer is what you would call an alibi." He paused a moment. "You said something about 9 o'clock, I think, but perhaps I had better tell you about the whole evening, to be on the safe side. I can, easily. I finished dinner at about 8—my housekeeper will confirm that—and then I went out at once on one or two calls which I had to miss earlier in the evening, through visiting the Thorntons. Then at about 9.15 I came—well, as it happens, I came to this very house which I am going into as soon as you've finished with me. It is a nursing home, you know, and I was delivering a baby here from soon after 9 until about 10.30. Not a very easy labour, but they are both going to be all right, I think. Now, you had better come in and check those times with the matron and the nurse. You could try the mother too, if you liked, but I doubt if she would have been particularly interested in noticing the exact time, just then! Still, two good witnesses will satisfy you, won't they?"

There was certainly no doubt about it. According to the matron, the need for the doctor had suddenly become rather urgent, and as he had been expected at 9 both she and the nurse had noticed that it was at 9.10 that he had come. He had stayed for a little over an hour and a half, and he had certainly not left the house during that time.

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Cheviot felt considerable relief over that. Obviously, the doctor could not have been at a cross-roads eight miles away at just after 9, any more than he could have been with Miss Jones for half an hour or more after that. So that accusation was definitely false.

Cheviot had wanted a straightforward case, without unnecessary complications. Now, there was not a shadow of doubt that Janet Jones had seen her danger and had lied wildly, picking on a man at random for her charges—or at any rate picking on the first man she happened to hear after she realized she had to produce someone. Thus it was clear that she had been “picked up” by Mr. Thornton and by nobody else, and that she had subsequently murdered him.

7

By the time he returned to the house, therefore, Cheviot had mapped out the general lines on which he meant to prove his case against the girl. He told a constable to go and fetch her and settled down to wait, wondering whether he could now drive her into a full confession. If he could, it would certainly save him a lot of trouble over tracing the stiletto to her, besides other things. . . .

But while he was still pondering over that prospect and the best way of getting what he wanted, the constable hurried in again. “Excuse me, sir,” he said, “but I nearly forgot. This packet came for you twenty minutes ago. Rushed in by hand, and marked ‘Extremely urgent,’ sir.”

Cheviot took it from the man, feeling fairly sure that it could be nothing but the post-mortem report and wondering what could be regarded as urgent, let alone “extremely urgent,” about that. Probably it only meant that some hospital clerk was being important and officious.

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Yet when the post-mortem report was spread out in front of him, Cheviot gasped. For it stated, without any equivocation, that John Thornton had not died of a stab-wound but of chloral hydrate poisoning. The stabbing had been done after his death.

CHAPTER FIVE

ALL SUSPECTS SUSPECTED

1

IT altered everything. But did it make anything simpler? Did it mean that two people had tried to kill John Thornton on the same evening, one of them succeeding and the other only failing because he was too late?

Or had one person made two efforts to kill him, using two different methods with the idea of making death doubly sure?

Or could it be that a single murderer had drugged him in order to preventing him from resisting when he was stabbed, but that the drug had killed him, without the murderer appreciating the fact, instead of merely rendering him drowsy or insensible?

That was one new problem.

Another trouble was that the whole case was now in the melting pot with—probably, anyhow—an earlier timetable, as well as a different weapon. That meant that no previous theory any longer applied, the possibilities with regard to each suspect had to be reviewed, and the case had to be started afresh.

And yet all the old mysteries and puzzles remained: the silence from Thornton's room reported by the housekeeper—though the discovery might have a bearing on that, certainly—the stiletto, the broken window, the disappearance of the rucksack, and above all the presence in the house of the girl, Janet Jones. The case would never be solved until all of those things had been explained.

Although he was accustomed to leave the "apparatus" of detection in the charge of Sergeant Kimber—the search for finger-prints, measurements, photography and the hunting for physical clues—Cheviot always carried in his pocket a little book which summarized the actions and symptoms of poisons. From this he now learnt that chloral hydrate was a colourless liquid, with "a pungent, not acrid, odour"—whatever that might mean—and a pungent, somewhat bitter, taste. It could cause death in as short a time as fifteen minutes, although cases had been known in which death had not occurred for six hours. . . . Well, its action had certainly not taken anything like six hours in this case, since John Thornton had been seen on the stairs by Miss Corley at 8.30 and had been found dead a few minutes after 11.

The book also told Cheviot that anyone who took an overdose would "become drowsy and pass into a state of coma" within a few minutes—certainly within a quarter of an hour—of taking it. Moreover, the victim would not have any warning of what was going to happen—at any rate nothing to tell him that he had been drugged or poisoned, nothing to induce him to cry out or try to summon help: he would simply yawn a couple of times and then lay his head down and slip into a coma.

Practically from the moment of taking the poison, therefore, John Thornton would have been right out of the drama which had been played that night in his house. The housekeeper's evidence—assuming, of course, that it could be trusted—was to the effect that there had been complete silence in his room from 8.35 till after 10; and that might be taken to imply that he had collapsed at about 8.45 and

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had died quietly within an hour or so, the "bangs" in his room being caused when the knife was driven into his dead body, after 10 o'clock.

Very well, then. Now, if those times could be fixed more definitely and certainly. . . .

3

Meanwhile, an urgent task was to locate the source of the poison. Cheviot himself searched the house, and particularly the bedrooms, for bottles of narcotic. There was, of course, one in Nancy's bedroom—the draught which Dr. Hadly had given her the evening before (as was shown by the date on its label) after her father's death. That was not of any particular interest, except for its label: a plain one, without any chemist's name, which suggested that the doctor did his own dispensing, and with the words "A tablespoonful to be taken at night when required. The dose should on no account be repeated within 24 hours." Only a single dose, as was to be expected, had been taken from that bottle.

But there was another and exactly similar bottle, with the same warning on the label, in Mr. Thornton's bedroom. It bore a date of two months earlier. From that bottle three doses had been taken.

Cheviot sent the bottle from Thornton's room to the analyst at Scotland Yard. Then as an afterthought he also sent the bottle from Nancy's room: it seemed rather absurd to do so, but there was no harm in doing things thoroughly.

4

Cheviot then went again in search of Peter Thornton. He found him this time in the sitting-room with his sister.

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Nancy was still showing obvious shock-effects: she was pale and eye-ringed, and she looked as if Dr. Hadly's sleeping-draught had not been entirely efficacious.

With a vague feeling in his preoccupied mind that there was something familiar about the question, Cheviot said, "When did you last see your father?"

"He joined us for tea," Peter answered, "and then went up to his study. That is the last time I actually *saw* him."

"And you, Miss Thornton—did you see him after that?"

"No. You see he doesn't—didn't like being interrupted at his work. So we never disturb him when he is in his study."

"But he didn't mind being disturbed by Dr. Hadly, last night?"

Peter said, "I expect he did for a minute—before he realized who it was. Uncle Charles wouldn't have gone up if it hadn't been for something rather urgent."

"This question was about your sister, as you told me. I gather he had already spoken with some finality about that, so another visit on the subject wouldn't have pleased him. But I will go into that later. At the moment, I want to keep to this point about times. Dr. Hadly was with your father roughly from 6 till 7, I understand. And some time after he left, you and your sister went out?"

"Not for about three-quarters of an hour."

"Without seeing your father to say good-bye?"

"We didn't see him, we called out and he answered."

"You are quite sure he answered? And that would be at about 7.45? That carries on the time-table quite a bit, and Miss Corley takes it farther. She saw him on the stairs at 8.30: she imagines he was going down to collect his evening meal from the kitchen. By the by, isn't that rather odd? Why did he keep a dog and bark himself?"

Peter said, "What on earth do you mean by that?"

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"Why wasn't his meal brought to him by Miss Corley?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's the system. We have a regular sit-down meal in the middle of the day, and then a scratch meal at night. We take what we want when we want it, which means that there are all sorts of odd snacks going at different times. Nancy or I may come in late, or we may want something early. Dad liked to have his in his room, when he felt like that. Winifred takes hers in the kitchen."

"I see," said Cheviot. "And last night in particular?"

"Nancy and I only had coffee, because there were to be sandwiches later at the rehearsal."

"And your father? Can you suggest what he would have had?"

He was careful to say it very casually, as if it did not matter in the least. But, nevertheless, both Peter and Nancy looked at him very sharply. "Hanged if I see what that has to do with his being stabbed," said Peter.

"Nothing at all, probably," Cheviot answered. "But a stab wound isn't necessarily fatal, and as often as not when you die quickly from one it is the shock as much as anything that kills you. And that kind of shock would have more effect on a full stomach than on an empty one. So it will help me to know whether your father had a big meal last night." (That was almost certainly nonsense, Cheviot thought: but it sounded fairly reasonable, and he hoped they would let it pass. It was always against his policy, with surprise developments in a case, to show his hand before he was forced to).

"Oh, I see," Peter said. "Well, he can't have had a big meal last night, because supplies were a bit short and there was nothing in the larder except a couple of sausage rolls and a few bananas. I expect he had those and a cup of coffee."

Cheviot was blessed with a retentive memory. Sergeant

ALL SUSPECTS SUSPECTED

Kimber's list of the things found in Mr. Thornton's room was photographed in his mind. Certainly there had been no mention of a plate or a cup and saucer there.

He said, "You say your father liked his meal in his room. But I suppose he might have taken sausage rolls and coffee in the kitchen, thinking it not worth while to carry so little upstairs?"

"Oh, I don't think he'd have done that," said Peter. "He never does, and—well, he lived by rule, rather, so I don't expect he'd have done anything different from usual."

"I see," said Cheviot. That made it very odd, where the crockery had gone. It looked like another mystery. In any case, it certainly produced the suggestion that either the coffee or the sausage rolls had contained the poison. And if it was the coffee, then the poison must have been added after Peter and Nancy took theirs.

He knew it would be a give-away, but a question had to be asked. "At what time, exactly, did you two make coffee for yourselves?"

Peter said, "What the devil has that——?"

Nancy's face seemed to show that she was startled—and puzzled, perhaps. "I made it," she said. "At about half past seven, I think."

"Oh yes." With an idea—even if it seemed a very improbable one—at the back of his mind, Cheviot turned away from her and addressed his next question to Peter. It was always just as well that two witnesses to an incident should corroborate one another. "Then she brought it to you and you drank it in here?"

There was certainly puzzlement in Peter's eyes.

"Yes, of course," he said. "Of course."

It was interesting—or might be, Cheviot reflected. At

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7.30, Nancy Thornton had been alone in the kitchen, near the food in the larder.

5

Cheviot left them and went to the kitchen. In the larder he found a bunch of bananas. There were no longer any sausage rolls. He found two tins of coffee, one of them half-empty, and sent them for analysis.

He then went back to the little study to do some solid thinking.

It now looked fairly certain that there had been poison in John Thornton's last meal, which he ate soon after 8.30. In that case, he would have been insensible before 9.

But then he could not possibly have been driving a car at 9.10. It could not be he, after all, who had brought Janet Jones to the house!

That did, indeed, alter everything!

If it wasn't Mr. Thornton, who could it have been? Not either Peter Thornton or Dudley Perm, partly because—even with false moustaches—they could not be mistaken for men of middle age, but more still because of the scornful way in which Miss Jones had laughed at the idea of it being either of them. It could not be Dr. Hadly, because of his alibi. Then it would have to be a man who had not yet figured in this case, but who had some reason for doing such a thing, either connected with the murder or not—and who also had a latchkey to the house. . . .

But if Mr. Thornton had been insensible by 9, who had bolted the front door?

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There was, surely, only one reasonable answer to these questions: that *there had never been any man* who picked up Miss Jones at a cross-roads and brought her to the house. In fact, that the girl had completely invented that story. And also, of course, the little embellishment about the bolted door.

But then, how had she got in? And why had she come?

Well, at any rate, it would then be obvious why she had come: to kill John Thornton, either by poison or by stabbing. Never mind at the moment why she should have wanted to kill him. Supposing she was the poisoner. Then she must have been in the house before 8.30—and nothing was known, so far, about the conditions in which she could have got in as early as that. The door, for instance, might have been left open for a minute or two after Dr. Hadly left at 7.

Excitedly, Cheviot began to review the possibilities under this new theory.

You had to assume a motive. Whatever it was, it implied some past connection between Miss Jones and Thornton—they could not have been strangers.

The girl would have come up the drive in the early evening, armed with poison—possibly also with a stiletto!—and seeking some means of unseen entry into the house. An opportunity would have occurred, and she would have slipped inside, hiding herself somewhere. At about a quarter to eight, she would have seen—no, not necessarily. Perhaps at 7.30 she would have seen Nancy carrying coffee to Peter in the sitting-room, she would have realized that Miss Corley and Mr. Thornton were still upstairs and thus that the coast was clear. So she would have slipped into the

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kitchen and have soaked the sausage rolls with poison——H'm. How did she know that they would be eaten by Thornton and not by the housekeeper? Well, that was a point for enquiry.

In any case, she could have laid the poison. The sensible thing would then have been to cut and run, of course, but when young girls take to murder they are usually emotional rather than sensible. Janet Jones might have stayed to see what happened, hiding herself again. Perhaps she saw who took the sausage rolls; perhaps she didn't. She could have waited on, for results. Eventually, she would have gone upstairs, listening at doors. There would have been sounds from the housekeeper's room, to prove that she was alive, but utter silence from Thornton's room. She would have gone in there and found him dead and——

Was it possible that she would then have driven the stiletto between his shoulder-blades, because she would not have had the technical knowledge to tell her that he was quite dead, and would have wanted to make sure of things?

In any case, she would have removed the crockery of Mr. Thornton's supper, washing the things in the kitchen so that there should be no traces. And then—— Perhaps she heard Nancy and Peter returning, and knew she was trapped. So she dashed upstairs again and staged her "discovery of the body" with a scream at exactly the right moment. And then told that elaborate and utterly false story to account for her presence in the house.

Was it possible? Oh yes, it was quite possible, and not necessarily too wildly improbable.

Only it did not account for the broken window—if that had anything to do with the case.

Anyhow, the thing now was to test it.

Although a constable told him that Miss Jones had arrived, he decided to let her wait. He walked past her in the hall—ignoring her indignation and protests—and went upstairs to look for the housekeeper, finding her at last in one of the bedrooms.

"I'm making out a time-table of all that happened last night," he explained to her. "There are one or two gaps in it at present. What were you doing from 7 o'clock onwards?"

"Well, now," she said. "There's not so much doing in the evening, which is a blessing, and I take it easy. At 7 I should say I was in my room, with a magazine. And at a quarter to eight I did the beds, turning down. Then at 8, when Mr. Peter and Miss Nancy had gone, I went into the kitchen for my meal."

"I gather that is not a very satisfactory part of the arrangements here," Cheviot suggested. "You only get a snack, don't you, not a sit-down, square meal?"

"It's all I want," she answered, "after a good tuck-in at midday. And there's plenty, if you look after yourself and keep back what you want. Last night, I had the remains of a steak pudding, hotted up. Of course, I don't put all the bits and pieces back in the larder, you know."

"You've a private store of food?"

"Not a store, but I take what I want. If I didn't, somebody might gobble it all and I'd be left with nothing."

Cheviot grinned at her and said, "You did pretty well with that steak pudding. Mr. Peter tells me that his father would only have had two sausage rolls and some bananas."

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"It would be all he'd want. He used to peck at his food like a bird."

"Well," said Cheviot, "go on with the time-table. How long did you spend over your meal, do you think?"

"Twenty minutes, maybe. Then I washed up the cups that Mr. Peter and Miss Nancy had used, and my own things, and after that——"

"You were in the kitchen or the scullery all this time, from 8 till 8.30?"

"Oh yes. Getting on with things."

"Then the coffee cups of Mr. Peter and Miss Nancy had been brought back to the kitchen?"

"No, of course not. I had to fetch them."

"Then you were not in the kitchen all the time?"

"Except for a couple of minutes or so."

She wasn't ever accurate on points of time, Cheviot reflected. It might have been longer than two minutes—long enough for chloral hydrate to be poured onto two sausage rolls.

He said, "And when you finally left the kitchen, did you go upstairs immediately, passing Mr. Thornton on the way?"

"Well," she said, "I took a look round in the sitting-room on the way, seeing if everything was tidy."

So that was it. There had been two short opportunities when Janet Jones could have laid the poison.

8

It was never wise, in the early stages, to concentrate on one theory to the exclusion of all other possible ones, so Cheviot gave some thought to the alternatives. There were certainly several in these new circumstances—at any rate

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if the problem of what Janet Jones was doing in the house were ignored: and if the problem of the stabbing were ignored also.

For instance, a murderer who knew that Peter and Nancy would only be taking coffee, and who knew also of the housekeeper's private store of food, could safely have laid the poison in the sausage rolls a good time before 8.30: between 6 and 7, for instance, the hour when Dr. Hadly had been in the house. So he could be a suspect.

Nancy Thornton—though what on earth could have been her motive and could she be acting her distress over her father's death?—was admitted to have been alone in the kitchen at 7.45. Miss Corley had been alone there for the half-hour from 8 to 8.30. Dudley Perm might, for all that was known at present, have had the run of the house during the afternoon or evening. And—

Cheviot suddenly broke off from his thoughts and went to find Peter Thornton. When he found him, he said, "There is just one small point—probably it has nothing to do with anything, but little inconsistencies always worry me and I like to have everything cut and dried. It was your sister, wasn't it, who made the coffee last night, while you waited in the sitting-room?"

"Yes, that's right."

Peter was looking at him in a very puzzled way—or else, just possibly, in a very suspicious way, as if he was half afraid of what was coming next. It might be that, conceivably.

Cheviot said, "That's what I understood. Then how did you know that there was a shortage of supplies in the larder, and nothing but two sausage rolls for your father's supper?"

Peter said, "Oh." Then he laughed, perhaps a little uncertainly. "I felt a bit peckish at about 7 and thought

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something with the coffee before setting out wouldn't come amiss. So I looked to see what there was. Only of course I couldn't rob Dad, so I let it go."

"Oh. I see," said Cheviot.

So Peter Thornton—again if he could have any conceivable motive—was another possibility.

CHAPTER SIX

MOTIVES

1

THE question of who had done the stabbing—and why it had been done—was now of secondary importance: yet it could not be ignored. A case always had to be taken as a whole. If Janet Jones had laid the poison—and was not also responsible for the stabbing—then the stiletto had been used by the housekeeper . . . but why? . . . or by Dudley Perm . . . but how had he got into the house? It couldn't, as far as was known at present, have been used by anyone else. And anyhow, why, why, why? Why should anyone, let alone two people out of that small group, have wanted to kill John Thornton?

So unquestionably the next matter to be tackled was that of possible motives.

2

Still, urgent as that question was, Cheviot did not feel he could keep Miss Jones waiting in the hall indefinitely. And if only he could get her fixed in one position or another, either as the poisoner or as the stabber——

He signed to the constable to bring her into the little study. As soon as she joined him there, she said, "I know I am on a hike, and of course it is exercise, walking from the police station to here and back, but it isn't exactly my idea of a good holiday!"

Cheviot said, "These interviews are made necessary by your not telling me the truth."

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"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," she cried. "I have, really."

"Certainly not when you told me Dî. Hadly picked you up at some cross-roads or other just after 9 last night. He was then in this town, delivering a baby."

"Oh. Then it must have been his twin brother."

"Incidentally," Cheviot insisted, "I now know that it wasn't Mr. Thornton either. Actually, I don't think it was anyone."

"Not anyone? But of course it was. You don't think I made up the whole thing, do you?"

"Yes," said Cheviot. "That is exactly what I do think, Miss Jones. I think you came here alone, and subsequently found it necessary to explain your presence here. So you produced that story. You saw—and admitted—that it was improbable, but nevertheless you counted on my accepting it. But then you had not realized that it was flatly contradicted by certain known facts."

"Oh, no, no," she cried. "I didn't do anything of the sort. Everything happened exactly as I told you. If it is contradicted by other things, it must be those other things that are wrong."

"I see," said Cheviot. He suddenly whisked the stiletto from his pocket. "Where did you get this?"

He was disappointed that she took it so calmly.

"Not mine," she said. "What is it—a paper-knife?"

"It has much more dangerous uses than slicing paper."

"Oh——! You don't mean——? That isn't what the man was killed with?"

"It has been taken from his body," said Cheviot. "Even if it isn't yours, you've handled it, haven't you?"

"How frightfully gruesome," she cried. "No, of course I haven't touched it."

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He said, "Tell me what you were wearing, when this unknown man is supposed to have picked you up."

"Exactly what I've got on now. Look here, couldn't you put that horrible thing away? It really is a bit grim, isn't it?"

Cheviot put the stiletto down on the table in front of him. If it had so much effect on her, its presence could be useful. For he knew from long experience the advantage of getting a witness—and particularly a guilty one—upset and rattled.

"Never mind about that," he said. "Do you mean that you wear the same clothes for walking in the heat of the day as in the evening?"

"I do bits of strip-tease," she answered. He could see that she was making an effort not to look at the stiletto; but for all that, she remained astonishingly calm. "It gives the local inhabitants quite a thrill," she said.

"But you'd have wanted more for a cold evening," he suggested. "Your gloves, for instance. Or did you leave them in your rucksack?"

Again she did not turn a hair.

"I never wear them on hikes. I feel it looks silly—like the 'fat white woman whom nobody loves'."

"I see," said Cheviot, though he didn't, not being a reader of poetry. "You know, it is very odd that you left no finger-prints where I would have expected to find them."

"Oh, is that why you asked about gloves?" she cried. "Were you trying to catch me? But I must have left finger-prints, I suppose, if it is true that you do on anything you touch. Have you looked on the coffee-pot, and the hand-rail? They would be there, wouldn't they?"

"They are not on this knife," said Cheviot, picking it up again and nonchalantly playing with it.

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She said, "Is this what they call the third degree?"

"Nothing like it," Cheviot retorted, a little angrily. "Just a simple questioning. How do you explain your prints not being on the knife?"

She stared at him. "I don't see how they could be. You don't seem to believe a single thing I say, but really I didn't touch it.

"Very well," said Cheviot. "Now, which of the people in this house had you met before to-night?"

"None of them. I told you."

"I know you did. But that is another of your statements that I cannot accept."

She said, "I don't want to sound rude, but you make me tired. You really do. You keep asking the same questions again and again, just as if you expected to get different answers. How can I tell you anything different? I told you at the beginning that you wouldn't believe my story, so there is not the slightest point in your telling me you don't, every few minutes. What you have to do is to accept it without being able to believe it. Like—just like the idea that a star has ceased to exist millions of years before we see it: nobody could possibly believe that, only we all accept it just as if we did believe it, and we certainly don't go about saying every few minutes that we 'can't accept it'."

Feeling a little peeved at that foolishness, Cheviot said, "If you've quite finished, we'll get on. My point is that you cannot have come to this house as an entire stranger."

"Why ever not?" she retorted. "You did."

"Me?"

"I don't suppose you are exactly an old friend of the family, but you came here—and at 1 o'clock in the morning too! Now, don't bark at me," she went on. "I know that is fairly silly, but it is not a bit sillier than some of the

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things you say. Anyhow, I've told you why I came into the house: I was asked in and told to expect a cup of coffee from a Mrs. Chisholm. It wasn't my fault that there wasn't any Mrs. Chisholm and I had to make the coffee for myself."

As that gave him an idea, Cheviot stifled his retort to it and said, "At what time did you go and make that coffee?"

"Oh, I don't know. I wasn't watching the time. But it must have been after 10."

"Oh yes. And you didn't have any difficulty in finding the kitchen?"

"I wandered down the passage till I did find it."

"You were making yourself very much at home, weren't you? Making coffee must have meant looking into the larder."

"Oh, I've no morals about that kind of thing."

"I'm not suggesting that it was a major crime," said Cheviot. "But I am wondering why you looked in the larder. Isn't it more usual for tins of coffee to be kept in a store cupboard?"

"I should have said so. But I couldn't find it there, so I tried the larder."

"Or perhaps it was the larder you were most interested in?"

"I wouldn't have minded something to eat, if that's what you mean. But the cupboard was bare and so the poor dog got none—I mean, there was no food in the larder except some bananas and a tin of biscuits."

"Oh come," said Cheviot with deep cunning. "There were those two sausage rolls."

It didn't work. Either she had not been to the larder before 8.30, or she was being very cool and extremely careful.

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"Oh, I'm sure there weren't," she said. "I'd have been bound to notice them and then I'd have been horribly tempted. I adore sausage rolls."

"I don't suppose you were too preoccupied with your hunger to notice things in other places besides the larder," he suggested. "The sink, for instance. In fact, you must have seen that, while you were filling the percolator or whatever you made the coffee in. Were there any cups and plates waiting to be washed up?"

She screwed up her face, as if in an effort to remember. "N—no, I don't think so."

"Then you must have seen such things in Mr. Thornton's room. Why did you remove them?"

"Oh, I didn't. I didn't touch anything."

"Then how do you account for the fact that Mr. Thornton had two sausage rolls and a cup of coffee for his supper and no dirtied plate or cup can be discovered?"

She was very sharp. "Two sausage rolls?" she repeated. "Do you mean the two you asked me if I saw in the larder? If so, unless he had his supper frightfully late—— You are trying to catch me, aren't you? I don't see how it is supposed to work, or what you expect to gain by it, but it's a bit dirty, isn't it? I mean, not frightfully sporting. Why don't you ask your questions straight out?"

Cheviot said, "I don't regard murder as 'sport,' Miss Jones. But if you want me to be more direct with you, I will do so. You may perhaps have gone to the kitchen at some time after 10—in fact, I think you did go, in order to wash that crockery which you found in Mr. Thornton's room. But I think you also went a good deal earlier: certainly before 8.30 and probably before 8."

"But how could I have done?" she cried. "I didn't get here till a quarter past 9."

"That is according to your story—which I don't believe.

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Don't you see that I know far too much by now for it to be worth your while to persist in that story?"

"Oh dear," she said, "you are a nuisance. I never met anyone so utterly unbelieving."

3

Cheviot said, "If you insist that you did not wash that crockery, how do you account for the fact that the dirty plate and cup have not been found?"

"I don't know," she answered. "Wouldn't he have washed them up himself?"

That, Cheviot thought, was the worst of women: they were always satisfied to produce simple explanations which didn't get you anywhere. In this case, the simple explanation was certainly wrong, because if Mr. Thornton had washed his own dishes he would have fallen asleep in the sink, not over his desk.

He said, "Then you are not prepared to give me any help?"

"Wasn't that helpful?" she retorted. "It seemed to me a frightfully good answer, even if rather obvious. But I don't see how I can possibly help, if you don't believe anything I say."

"Then we are back where we started," said Cheviot. "I might perhaps believe your story if it was credible—if it was possible. But it isn't. The thing that brands it as utterly false is your statement that the man who is alleged to have brought you here went out of the house and drove away, leaving the door bolted behind him on the inside."

"I know that is worrying you," she said. "You told me before. But I can't help it. That is what happened."

Cheviot shrugged his shoulders.

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She said, "I suppose it does sound pretty impossible. Perhaps somebody else shot the bolts."

"There was nobody in the house to do it," he retorted, "except the housekeeper."

"Just the person, I should have thought," she said. "I mean, I've never known a housekeeper, I think, but isn't that what they do? Locking up, and that sort of thing?"

"And why should she have done it, seeing that she knew that two members of the family were out?"

Janet said, "Well, but she can't have been the only person in the house. There was Mr. Thornton. And I suppose there must have been the man who stabbed him."

There could be no possible harm, Cheviot decided, in showing his ace at that point. "Mr. Thornton was dead by that time," he said. "Or if not necessarily dead, at least insensible. Do you know much about chemistry?"

"Chemistry?" she repeated. "What I learnt at school. That wasn't much, though."

"Remember that I shall check everything you say. How do you come to have access to chloral hydrate?"

She said, "What on earth is that?"

"It is the poison that caused Mr. Thornton's death."

Sceptical as he was, Cheviot could not deny that she looked utterly astonished.

"But—but he was stabbed. I saw the knife sticking out of his back. And——" she pointed to the stiletto on the table—"you said that was it."

"It was in his back, certainly. But it did not kill him, because he was already dead by the time he was stabbed."

It was the tone in which she cried out "Oh!" at that, with an astonishment which he was sure could not have been feigned, that decided Cheviot to go a bit further with her.

He leant forward and said, "Look here, Miss Jones, I'll

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put my cards on the table. Mr. Thornton died from poisoning, not from the stabbing. Therefore the person who stabbed him is not guilty of murder. You may have driven the knife into his body, but you have said a lot to convince me that you did not give him the poison. Assuming that I stick to that idea—that nothing makes me think differently—I cannot charge you with the murder. But at the same time, I don't believe the story you have told me. Now, in view of that—that easement of your position, aren't you prepared to tell me the truth about yourself?"

To his surprise—and momentary disappointment—she did not reply directly to that. Instead, she said, "Well, I don't know anything about the law, but if you know I didn't kill him, why on earth are you keeping me locked up?"

"Is that all you have to say?"

"I think it is quite important. Can't I do something about 'wrongful imprisonment'? And doesn't Magna Carta come into it somewhere?"

Cheviot said sternly, "I am still waiting for an answer to my question."

"Oh, that," she said. "You know, you might use a gramophone record for that one. And I could have one for my answer. I have told you the truth, all the time. The exact literal truth, and nothing else."

4

Being no more afraid of Magna Carta than of anything else, Cheviot sent her back to the police station. He was annoyed with her and he felt checked and frustrated by her foolishness: but for all that he did not now believe her guilty of the poisoning. But she was guilty of something,

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certainly, and that something was a part of his case. Till she was prepared to come clean about it—or until he could learn the truth elsewhere—he had to keep her at hand: it would be hopeless to let her go wandering over the country on her “hike,” so that she would not be available if he learnt something else and wanted her for immediate questioning.

Later, if she kicked up more fuss, there could be a charge against her of breaking and entering, on the strength of that smashed window, backed by her unexplained presence in the house—there would be no need to mention in the police court that the latch of the door could not have been reached from the window—and although she would eventually be discharged, of course, she would at least be legitimately kept under lock and key while he got on with his job. And the experience might stop her damned insolence.

With the feeling of irritation still on him, Cheviot greeted Sergeant Kimber, who had just arrived after some hours' sleep: this time, the sergeant's “Oh, good morning, sir,” was coldly ignored.

“I have been through your report on the dead man's room, Sergeant Kimber, but it isn't nearly full enough: you ought to have known I should want more than that.”

Recognizing the signs, Kimber only said, “Yes, sir. Certainly, sir.”

“Well then, fill it out,” said Cheviot. “I don't merely want lists of articles, I want the implications from them. Thornton had been in that room since about 4.30, except for five minutes between 8.30 and 8.35. For one hour of that time he had been talking to Dr. Hadly. What did he do for the rest of it? In particular, what had he done during the two and a half hours between 8.35 and just after 11?”

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Sergeant Kimber would have liked to answer, "Died, sir;" but that would have been extremely dangerous just now. How could he tell, though, from the sight of an empty desk, what the man had been—— Then the force of that struck him. He said, "His desk was quite clear, sir: nothing on it at all."

"He had been having a snack meal. There ought to have been some crockery. I know you didn't mention it, so I take it that it wasn't there. But I want to know if there were any indications at all that he had had a meal, even if the more obvious ones had been cleared away. Crumbs, for instance, or anything of that sort."

Sergeant Kimber said, "No sir, there was nothing of that sort." Then, lest his inspector should be so single-minded as to miss the other point, which might be important, he said, "There wasn't a thing on his desk, sir, nothing at all."

Cheviot said, "Oh. You are trying to rub it in to me, aren't you, that he hadn't laid out his evening's occupation, whatever it was? Well, why should he, as he was having a meal?"

"Plenty of time after that, sir."

It was always a nuisance, Cheviot felt in his more irritable and unreasonable moments, that sergeants couldn't know by second-sight the things they had not been told. Still, in this imperfect world, it wasn't fair to blame them. . . . He took from his pocket the post-mortem report and passed it to Kimber.

Kimber said, "Golly! Makes a bit of difference, doesn't it, sir?"

"Quite a bit. As far as this particular point goes, since he must have got the poison in that meal I am speaking of, he would have collapsed almost immediately. So it can't have been he who removed the plate and cup. Also, this

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is the explanation of his not having laid out his evening's work."

"Yes, sir," said Kimber. "He'd been up there since 4.30, you said, sir?"

"More or less. You mean he must have been doing something all that time, don't you? No doubt he had: then he cleared the desk to make room for his meal. The house-keeper says he was a tidy chap, didn't like having his papers disturbed."

It was always safest to let the inspector get ideas for himself, after a little discreet prompting: he liked things better that way. So Kimber said, "Yes, sir. Just a plate and cup and saucer for this meal, you said, sir?"

As the idea suddenly came to him, Cheviot said, "There may be a point in this, I think. I doubt if I would clear a whole desk just for a meal like that. I'd push my papers on one side. I wonder why he cleared everything?"

It had worked at last, so the inspector would be pleased with himself, might even be a bit better tempered. "There might be something in it, as you say, sir," Kimber said. "And there wasn't any sign in the drawers that things had been shoved away in a hurry."

"I see," said Cheviot thoughtfully. "I gathered from Miss Corley, that it was normal for bits of paper to lie on his desk. Then either he put them away carefully before going to fetch his supper, or he wasn't doing that kind of work just then. Or, of course—— Was there any indication that his drawers had been looked through?"

"No, sir. Nothing that struck me, anyhow. Unless you count the fact that he had a filing cabinet with nothing in it."

For a moment Cheviot was outraged. "Why didn't you report that?"

"Oh, I did, sir. It's in the list: one filing cabinet, empty."

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For a second Cheviot was tempted to retort that that was not the same thing. But that was hardly fair: it *was* the same thing, of course—until you began to have suspicions about it: only then did the question of emphasis on “nothing in it” begin to count. So he looked more agreeably at Sergeant Kimber, and said, “All right, it’s not your fault, sergeant. But isn’t an empty filing cabinet an odd thing to find?”

“I took it for a new one, sir, not yet started.”

“Is there an old one as well, then, full or nearly full?”

“No, sir. That is to say, there’s another, but plenty of space in it still.”

“Then either Mr. Thornton bought things ahead, or else what you took for a new one is one that has been cleared out. You’d better get busy on that at once, sergeant. Look for any signs that the alleged new one has been in use. Also go through any receipts you can find, to see how long ago it was bought. And do anything else on those lines that you can think of. This may be very important.”

5

Though he was well aware that the empty filing cabinet might prove to be nothing but a mare’s nest, Cheviot determined to follow that line, at least a little way, and see where it led him. He went in search of Peter Thornton again; but while looking for him he met Nancy, and decided that she could tell him what he wanted to know, just as well—or possibly better.

She followed him unwillingly into the study.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” she exclaimed. “I can’t even bear to think about it.”

“I quite appreciate that it is very painful for you,”

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Cheviot said. "But the things I want to ask you about only bear indirectly on what has happened. In the first place, am I right in thinking that your father was once in business, but has now—I mean had since retired?"

"He was a merchant in the City. He retired five years ago."

"Rather young to retire," said Cheviot. "But I gather he had made his pile?"

"I don't know much about it, but he must have done awfully well. I have always understood that he was very lucky during the war."

"Oh yes. But it must have been an acute change, from the life of a busy business man to retirement with apparently no hobbies or occupations. I could understand that, if it had happened just after your mother died——"

"Oh no. She died when I was a child—sixteen or seventeen years ago."

"Then as far as you know there wasn't any striking event that led immediately to his giving up business—It was just that he had all the money he wanted?"

She said, "I suppose so."

"And he never complained to you that the new life was boring?"

"No, never. I used sometimes to think it must be, but he never complained. I—I think he liked being alone."

"Then," said Cheviot, "he must have had some occupation. What was it?"

"Something to do with money, I think. He wrote a good many letters. I suppose he was always shifting his investments. Don't they call it 'following the markets?' He had financial papers every day."

"An entrancing occupation, I believe," said Cheviot, "for those who have that type of mind." He did not mean it to sound sarcastic: but that kind of thing hadn't the

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slightest appeal to him. "Now tell me about something else," he went on. "I am afraid this is a bit more personal. What was your father's objection to Mr. Dudley Perm?"

"Oh!" she cried. "Must—must you go into that? It can't have anything to do with—with——"

"I am afraid I must. I have to know about everything, you see. What was the objection? It must have been something pretty definite."

"It was only because Daddy had such lots of money and he wanted me to marry someone who—who could keep me very well."

"Some one person in particular?"

"Oh no. He wasn't match-making, but he thought Dudley's income wasn't—wasn't secure enough. That's because he didn't understand free-lancing. When you've established your connections, it is just as secure as anything else. Only Daddy could never see that."

"You said he would have preferred someone who could keep you well. That implies that Mr. Perm couldn't. So the size of the income must have had something to do with it, as well as the insecurity."

"Dudley makes nearly a thousand a year," she answered. "That isn't bad to start on."

Cheviot grinned. "You make me jealous," he said. "But all this suggests that your father had something more definite against Mr. Perm than the question of his income. Was there ever any hint of that?"

"No," she said. "Oh no, never."

"How long have you known Mr. Perm?"

"Oh. Eleven months."

At one time, he would not have hesitated to say that in that case she had only Perm's word for the integrity of his past record, and perhaps Mr. Thornton had known more about that than she did. But now, with the ever-

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present aura of human understanding around him, he did not put it in that form.

"Mr. Perm seems a very decent fellow," he said. "But your father had an unfortunate prejudice against him. What I am trying to discover is what that prejudice was based on."

"I've told you," she said. "Dudley's income and the way he earns it."

"Yes, but—— Well, granting that initial prejudice, Mr. Thornton, as the careful father of a motherless daughter, might have thought it advisable to make some enquiries about the young man. Taking up references and that kind of thing, you know. If he had got one that wasn't altogether favourable——"

"There couldn't be anything like that about Dudley."

"I see," said Cheviot. "Now, I am going to ask a very personal question, Miss Thornton. I realize that you were very fond of your father. But marrying the man she is in love with is pretty important to a girl, and—well, I gather you are over 21 and entitled to make your own decisions. In that case, I wouldn't have expected you to bow so completely to your father's wishes. Doesn't that imply that you had a certain amount of doubt about Mr. Perm yourself?"

"Oh no!" she cried. "Not in the least. I—I trust Dudley absolutely."

"I see," said Cheviot. "You know, that does imply that he had denied some accusation."

She had flushed. It might have been with indignation, of course.

"No, no, never," she said.

"If there had been such an accusation—if the basis for it had been put in writing, I mean, and sent to your father—Mr. Perm might feel very uncomfortable. After all, one

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doesn't like even unjust charges—or unjust charges particularly, perhaps—to be left lying about.”

She said, “I—I don't in the least know what you mean. Of course no one has ever said anything like that about Dudley.”

Cheviot said, “Oh very well. I'm glad to hear it.”

But he was left with a doubt about how much she knew or suspected. If there had been a paper that Dudley Perm very much wanted to secure——

6

Cheviot got rid of Nancy, deciding to have his next talk with Miss Corley. But as he was going to look for her, a key turned in the lock of the front door and Dr. Hadly came in.

“Ah, Inspector,” said the doctor. “Still at it? Any more slanders about me?”

The question was natural enough, if said lightly. But it occurred to Cheviot that Dr. Hadly sounded as if he was really a little anxious about it. So he said, “Can you spare me a moment, doctor? In here, if you don't mind.”

They sat down, and Dr. Hadly lit a cigarette.

“As a doctor in a small provincial town,” Cheviot began, “you have a very vulnerable position. In the matter of slander, I mean.”

“And of criticism, professional or otherwise,” the doctor answered. “Like Henry V, I am ‘subject to the breath of every fool.’ Every doctor is, you know. But I haven't had more than my share.”

Cheviot smiled. “Isn't there a course at the hospitals on ‘hushing things up’?”

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"That is not the sort of thing you ought to say," retorted Hadly. "It is rather cheap, too."

"Sorry," said Cheviot. "But I didn't mean anything by it. I want to know about your last talk with Mr. Thornton. In particular, I want to know what was the basis of his strong objection to Mr. Perm."

"I never knew, really. It seemed to me unreasonable. The fellow has quite a good income and he ought to do better one day. But John was terribly obstinate."

"Was he the sort of man to be merely unreasonable without cause?"

"Oh. No, I don't think he was, really."

"Then we must assume he had a cause. What was it?"

"I've no idea. He never told me, never even hinted at anything. But if you meant just now—and would have said if I hadn't stopped you—that in a town of this type it isn't only the doctors who are vulnerable to slander, I daresay you are right."

"Yes, I did mean that," said Cheviot, untruthfully. "I thought there might be some story going around, about Perm."

"I've never heard one."

"Then if Mr. Thornton knew of anything—or thought he did—it must have been in some private communication to himself. Do you know where he would have kept anything like that, if he had had it?"

"He had a filing cabinet in his room, I think."

"I'll have a look there, then, just on the chance." Cheviot picked up Sergeant Kimber's list of the contents of the study and made a show of consulting it. "Oh yes. There are two filing cabinets. Can you tell me which it would be likely to be in?"

"Good Lord, no. Though now you mention it, I think

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one of them should be fairly empty. I remember John telling me the other day that he had bought a new one."

"Really? Then he must have been keeping a lot of papers. We'll have to have a good search, just on the chance. Tell me, you were really having difficulty with Thornton over this question of Nancy's marriage? A heated argument?"

"Heavens no. We were much too good friends for that. I put my persuasive points to him and—well, as a matter of fact I won him round."

"You did?"

"Yes. If he had lived, he would have told her by now that his opposition was withdrawn."

"Oh, really?" said Cheviot. "Do they know that—Nancy and Peter, I mean? And Mr. Perm?"

"Not yet. I couldn't intrude the subject last night, could I?"

"I don't see why not. And I hardly see how you were able to keep quiet when I was digging out the facts about Thornton's opposition to the match."

"I did my best to stop you doing that," Dr. Hadly retorted. "I thought if you started I should be forced to produce the news at that extremely inappropriate moment. But you insisted on going on and—well, I felt the best thing was to keep quiet for another twenty-four hours or so. As a matter of fact, I've come to tell them now."

"I see," said Cheviot. "But I do not see why you didn't tell me, when we were alone together directly afterwards."

"Oh, my dear fellow!" cried Hadly. "I couldn't do that, couldn't possibly. You've no human feelings, if you can't see that, at this moment of all moments, it is a thing they must be told by me, instead of having it blurted at them by you as a part of your case."

Cheviot said, "Oh very well." He hesitated, having a

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feeling that, wherever "human feelings" came into it, there was something wrong about all this. Then he said, "They knew you were speaking to Mr. Thornton last night—knew, I suppose, that you were going to make a special effort. Were they hopeful?"

"Restrained optimism," said Hadly. "Or perhaps a bit more than that. Yes, I think we all felt hopeful last night."

"Including Mr. Perm?"

"Oh yes. Not much 'restraint' about him. He was wildly excited about the prospect."

"Oh," said Cheviot. "He didn't give that impression to me."

"He probably got cold feet while waiting for the news. Though of course you didn't see him till after John's death. By that time, the results of my efforts didn't count as far as he was concerned, though I daresay that what I have to report will be a relief to Nancy—she won't feel she is going against the wishes of her dead father, you know."

It did not look as if there was anything more to be got on that point at the moment—though it was a little disturbing and would call for consideration later—so Cheviot dragged his mind away from it.

He said, "What was Thornton doing when you went in at six o'clock?"

"Totting up figures and all that. It's an absorbing occupation, for a man like John Thornton. Personally, I only do it for Income Tax returns, but John had something of the miser in him: he liked daily returns of his income and expenditure, and a balance."

Cheviot said, "That sort of thing should need the production of a lot of papers. Does it strike you as odd that there were none at all on his desk when we found his body?"

"Yes," said Dr. Hadly. "Oh yes, it does, a bit. Though I

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don't know why. It was getting late, wasn't it, and I suppose he had put away his papers for the night."

"It might be that, of course," answered Cheviot. "You mean, I suppose, that it was late when he was stabbed?"

"Wasn't it? Of course, I don't know anything about that. But—well, I suppose I had formed a private theory and was thinking on the lines of it."

"And what is your theory, doctor?"

"It is hardly fair to ask me that. And it may look rather like the result of personal feeling after that slanderous accusation. But—well, I was rather assuming that the girl who screamed had an attack of the horrors—if not exactly of remorse."

"Yes," said Cheviot. "I mean, that sounds like quite a reasonable theory, doesn't it?"

7

Since Peter and Nancy Thornton were likely to be occupied for some little time in receiving good news from Dr. Hadly, Cheviot next went into the kitchen. There he found the housekeeper busy preparing the lunch. She did not greet him with any warmth, and she continued at work while he talked to her.

"I've got that time-table fairly complete, now," he began. "There are only just one or two details to be checked. I think you said you washed up Mr. Peter's and Miss Nancy's cups and your own supper things before 8.30 last night. What about Mr. Thornton's?"

"He didn't start his meal till after that."

"I know. But his things would have had to be washed up eventually. Did you do them this morning?"

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"I always do, every morning. But not to-day."

"Why not?"

"There wasn't anything. Or if there was, I didn't have it. Not liking to go into that room to get it, you see."

"You could have asked one of the constables for the things."

"I did. But he said nothing was to be taken out. Which I was glad of, really. It would have given me the horrors to go in, with him there."

"Oh, you needn't have bothered about that. The body was removed last night. You'll have to dust that room again one day, you know."

"And I shan't enjoy it," she said. "Is there blood?"

The question reminded Cheviot that amid the many puzzles of the case he had been forgetting the question of bloodstained clothing. That must be attended to: the house would have to be searched—no! Heavens, how confusing this case was! Of course, the absence of bleeding was accounted for by the fact that the man was already dead when he was stabbed. There would have been no bloodstains.

Then what about Miss Jones's rucksack? Or hadn't she ever had a rucksack?

Again, he drew his mind away from these questions, to concentrate on the job on hand.

"I don't think you will be troubled with that," he said. "But you will have arrears of dusting to make up, won't you? I remember you told me that he didn't care about your doing it."

"Interfering with his papers was what I said."

"I suppose there were always lots of papers on his desk?"

"Only odd scraps. Plenty of them, though. Personally, I like a place to be tidy."

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"So you would have been surprised if you had ever seen his desk without anything on it?"

"Oh, it was never like that."

"Not even when he had cleared away his papers for the night?"

"He didn't, as far as I know. Always left odd bits of paper about."

"I see," said Cheviot.

It was really very odd about that cleared desk.

8

He left the kitchen and found Sergeant Kimber.

"Well?" he demanded. "I've been waiting for your report about that filing cabinet."

"There wasn't much to say, sir, so I didn't like to interrupt you. There's not a paper in the empty cabinet, nor any sign of one."

"H'm," said Cheviot. "It looks brand new?"

"There's nothing to tell you it isn't," said Kimber.

"And what about the receipts?"

"Well, sir, he bought a cabinet in 1951 and paid for it. But that's not to say he hasn't had a newer one since, just lately, and not paid for it yet. That's what it looks like to me."

"I see," said Cheviot. Dr. Hadly had mentioned that Thornton had spoken of buying one "the other day." So that was presumably all right, and all this line of enquiry was a mare's nest.

And yet, there was still this new puzzle to be added to the list. Why had there been nothing on John Thornton's desk?

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9

When Cheviot came to examine his morning's work, he found that he had done absolutely nothing that was worth while. At any rate, nothing which seemed to make any appreciable advance in his case. The puzzles remained, and were worse than ever. And as for motives—what exactly had he found so far? Dudley Perm had a motive, certainly—that had been known all along, from the first interview: but an attempt to make it look stronger had failed. Nancy Thornton had the same motive as Perm, though there was far less likelihood that she had let it lead her to murder. Janet Jones might have a motive, though there was nothing like proof of that, as yet. For the others—Peter Thornton, Winifred Corley and Dr. Hadly—there was no suggestion of any motive at all.

On the other hand, there were a number of suspicions, definite or indefinite. Miss Jones had told lies and could accordingly be suspected of almost anything. Dr. Hadly had been very odd about his interview with the murdered man. Dudley Perm one was bound to suspect at sight.

Against the other three there was nothing at all.

All of the suspects except Perm—and nothing was yet known about him on this point—had had an opportunity of laying the poison. At least, Dr. Hadly was not yet known to have been to the kitchen; but he very easily might have done, between 6 and 7 when he was supposed to be upstairs with Thornton.

On the other hand, only Winifred Corley and Janet Jones, as far as was known at present, had had opportunity for doing the stabbing.

So the case stood very much where it began.

CHAPTER SEVEN

STRONG SUSPECT

1

CHEVIOT'S suspicion of Dr. Hadly was extremely vague and really depended on little more than the action of his sixth sense. He therefore paid special attention to it. For he had often found that suspicions which he could not define or fully account for had germs of truth in them.

He therefore shut his eyes to the fact that the doctor had no truly reasonable motive, and set himself to work out what it was that his sixth sense was worrying about.

Dr. Hadly had produced in their third or fourth talk an item of important but apparently irrelevant information which he had not mentioned earlier: but he had an explanation of why he had not mentioned it, which, even if not very reasonable, was possible—not absurd or unbelievable. There ought not to have been anything to worry about in that. Only the sixth sense said there was.

H'm. Well the trouble, of course, was that Mr. Thornton had been obdurate in spite of a number of talks and much persuasion over this question of Nancy's marriage, and therefore it wasn't likely that he would suddenly swing right round with a completely changed mind. Why should he? All the arguments which Hadly could have produced at that last talk must have been pretty stale.

Hadly's new story was therefore surprising: and all the more so because it had not been told at the obvious moment.

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In fact, it had been told just when—in certain circumstances—it could be useful to Dr. Hadly!

Cheviot went over his memory of their conversation.

The doctor had said that John Thornton had been “unreasonable” and “terribly obstinate”—which made a change of face sound still more unlikely. Then he had deliberately—well it could have been “deliberately”—turned the conversation back to Perm as a possible suspect. After that, when things were brought back again to his talk in Thornton’s study, and he had been asked “Was it a heated argument?”—as surely it must have been, against unreasonableness and terrible obstinacy—he had denied that with some emphasis. And it was then, at exactly that moment, that he had produced this story of a friendly conversation which had ended in Thornton giving way completely.

So it was not unreasonable to think that Dr. Hadly had his own reasons for wanting to dispel that idea of a heated argument.

Of course, from his point of view, the lie—if it was one—did no harm now: it would only ease Nancy’s mind and conscience. But nevertheless, since doctors normally have strict integrity, the reason for telling it must have been pretty strong. In fact, Dr. Hadly must be thinking, surely, of his own fate if the truth came out about what had happened during that hour in the study. . . .

But what *had* happened? A heated argument was only what anyone would expect. So why should that look so very bad? And what on earth would that, however heated it was, have to do with chloral hydrate poisoning?

Well—an hour was quite a time for keeping up a heated argument. Supposing that the whole of the hour had not been occupied in that way? Supposing, in fact, that the appointment in the study had been only an excuse for

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coming to the house and being out of touch⁹ with Peter and Nancy—and that Dr. Hadly had spent a part of the time, not in the study at all, but in the kitchen? Supposing that the reason why he had wanted to divert attention from that talk and argument in the study was that, for part of the time at least, he had not been there, but had been in the kitchen, putting chloral hydrate into sausage rolls!

2

It was well past lunch-time. It could have been morning, noon or night, for all Cheviot knew or cared when his mind was deep in a case. But Sergeant Kimber thought differently about those matters. He therefore went to his inspector and said hopefully, "Done everything you've asked for, sir. Is there anything else, just at the moment?"

"Oh yes, rather," said Cheviot. "You can be most useful. I want you to stand in the hall with me and talk to me."

"What about, sir?"

"Oh, anything you like. I shan't be interested, but I'll look interested. You may have to keep it up for quite a time. I want to be in the hall, and I must have a reason for being there."

Actually, Sergeant Kimber had to keep it up for twenty-five minutes—a great strain on his imagination and conversational powers, particularly since what he wanted to think about—apart from his own lunch—was whether the inspector had suddenly gone off his nut. But at the end of that time, the sitting-room door opened and Nancy came out, followed by her brother and Dr. Hadly. It was evident that the doctor's announcement had been a great success.

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Cheviot cut Sergeant Kimber short right in the middle of a rather doubtful story about two bishops—for the sergeant had been driven down to that level when all else failed.

"Oh, hullo," he said. "I gather I may congratulate you, Miss Thornton. You and Mr. Perm will now be able to go ahead with easy minds."

"You know?" she said.

"Dr. Hadly told me. I'm sure it must be a great relief to you. Though of course you anticipated it, didn't you?"

"Anticipated it?"

"You knew about this special argument which Dr. Hadly was going to use?"

As Cheviot said it, he was aware that the doctor was smiling at him. Well, it didn't matter: no suspicions were given away by the fact that a detective checked statements made to him.

Nancy said, "I thought he was being too hopeful. I couldn't believe—— But you see he was right."

Peter said, with enthusiasm, "Good old Uncle Charles!"

It left things very much as they were, of course. But still it did not negative the theory, for Dr. Hadly wasn't likely to have slipped up on a point like that—if the talk with Thornton had been only an excuse, and it was important that the children should keep well out of the way, he would have told them a tale to ensure that.

But if only there was some method of really testing the theory. . . .

Cheviot said, "What was the invincible argument?"

"An appeal to sentiment," Dr. Hadly answered. "It is wonderful how you can sometimes sway a hard business man by dragging in a little emotion—it's a thing he isn't used to, so he doesn't know what to do about it. In this

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case—well, I spoke about my sister—his late¹ wife, you know—and how she would have regarded the issue.”

“And that brought him round at once, I suppose?”

“Practically. He was very fond of her, you see.”

“Yes,” said Cheviot. “Well, I congratulate you, doctor: it was a very sound move. How did you fill the rest of the hour?”

There was not the slightest doubt about it, that Dr. Hadly was taken off his guard, and taken aback, by that. He almost began to stammer.

“The rest of the t—time? After he’d agreed, you mean? Oh, we went on talking, mostly about my sister.”

“Instead of rushing down to tell Nancy the good news?”

By then the doctor had recovered himself. “My dear inspector,” he said, “you are no tactician, obviously. If I had rushed off immediately, John would have begun to wonder if he had done the right thing: and probably he would have taken it all back. So I kept him in play, rubbing in fond memories, till I was pretty sure of him. But you know,” he went on, “it is hardly fair to make me say all this here. I don’t in the least want Nancy and Peter to think I got round their father by a bit of trickery. I did nothing of the sort, of course: I just appealed to his deeper feelings and they won the day.”

“Oh, quite so,” said Cheviot. “I am sure everyone appreciates that. And at 7 you still didn’t stop to make your niece happy?”

“I looked for her, as a matter of fact: couldn’t find her anywhere.”

“I wish to goodness you had done,” said Peter. “It would have made all the difference to her. And actually we were still in the sitting-room.”

“No?” said Hadly. “Not really? I had assumed that you would be getting ready to start for the rehearsal and I

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knocked 'at Nancy's bedroom door. After that, I might have searched the house, but I had an urgent appointment and had to get away."

"Well," said Cheviot affably, "you've made up for it now. And I daresay this afternoon is as good a moment as any to tell the news." Then he said, "I can only say again, Miss Thornton, that I'm sure you must be very much relieved about this."

He wanted, of course, to seem as unofficial as possible, and quite unlike a detective who had just unearthed a vital clue. That was the line to take, undoubtedly: though he hardly hoped that Dr. Hadly would be deceived.

Still, it didn't matter much. The doctor had now given himself away and the case against him could continue.

3

Cheviot went upstairs; not so much because he had anything to do there as because at the moment he wanted Dr. Hadly to realize his position and become as near to being jittery as was likely in a self-controlled doctor—even one with murder on his conscience. It would be better if he wasn't given an opportunity to ask questions and offer explanations till his danger had sunk in.

Having come upstairs, though, Cheviot wanted an excuse for remaining there for a few minutes. He looked into John Thornton's study. It was exactly as it had been the previous night except for the removal of the body. He wondered whether Hadly had been there at all, yesterday evening. Probably he had, possibly twice, for he would have wanted to be seen going up at 6 and coming down, in a hurry for his appointment, at 7.

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That thought immediately brought another in its train. If Hadly was a murderer, now lying to cover his tracks, there had probably not been any "appointment" at that hour: he would merely have been producing an excuse to account for his having left the house as soon as he could after laying the poison. Well, that could be enquired into. Although, of course, the man would probably keep to one method of deceit: in his plan to have the run of the kitchen to himself, he had behaved to Peter and Nancy as if he really had a fresh argument to put to their father—and in much the same way, if he wanted an "appointment" he probably found an obliging patient who would make one at that hour.

Still, there might be points of interest to be found, there.

And, come to that——

Cheviot hastily left the study and went to Miss Corley's room. He was not altogether surprised to find her there.

He hid the signs of his haste and put on a smile.

"I don't suppose you've so very much to do to-day," he said, "with everything topsy-turvy and nobody paying much attention to the affairs of the house."

"It isn't that," she said. "I've lots to do, but I can't do it. With my mind wool-gathering all the time. As a matter of fact, I've only just realized that when I popped out this morning to get something for lunch—not that anybody ate it, but it went on the plates—I forgot the supper. Now I'll have to go out again."

"There's no hurry yet for that," said Cheviot. "I want you to spare me a little of your time first."

He realized that if he wasn't to give his ideas away completely, he would have to be exceedingly diplomatic with her.

"I am still quite a little worried," he said, "about your

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hearing so very little last evening from the room next door. It is only a thin partition and I wouldn't have thought you could have helped hearing more than you did."

"It's not a case of helping," she retorted. "I just didn't and that's that."

"Oh, I wasn't doubting it," he said hastily, "I was merely trying to explain it. However, we needn't bother about it. Now, do you remember telling me that after you were told not to dust Mr. Thornton's room you nevertheless did go in and clean up, when he was out. He never actually caught you at that, I suppose?"

"I told you he said——"

"Oh, I know. I didn't mean that. But did he catch you in the act, through not being out when you thought he was?"

"Of course not. I made sure."

"Clever of you," said Cheviot. "How did you do it?"

"I waited till I heard him go out of his room, when I was in here, and then I went to my door and looked to see if he'd got his hat."

"Oh yes. Then you could hear him go out of his room?"

"Oh. Well, sometimes I did."

"Without a great deal of listening, I expect. You'd hear his chair scrape back, wouldn't you?"

"I might, if it did."

"You'd be bound to hear that kind of thing, if you were waiting for it. I expect that makes all the difference. Tell me some other sounds you've heard, now and then, from that room."

"There's never much," she said.

"Let's take a particular time, and try it out. Sort of memory game, you know. Any time would do. Let me see, you said, in the time-table you gave me, that you were reading a magazine in here between 6 and 8 last night.

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That would do as well as any other time. Can you remember what you heard in that time?"

"It wasn't that long," she answered. "I didn't come up till about half-past six."

"Never mind," said Cheviot, although he was disappointed. "Start then."

"Oh," she said, in a tone which made him wonder if she was unwilling to say anything. "Well, I don't remember anything."

"Really, that's extremely interesting. You didn't hear any sounds at all from next door between 6.30 and 7? Nothing, for instance, to suggest that Mr. Thornton wasn't alone then?"

"Oh. Well, I didn't say that. There was talk, of course."

"All the time?"

"Y—es. Up to 7 o'clock, anyhow."

"I see," said Cheviot. It was very difficult to pretend not to be specially interested in this—to maintain the fiction that the time was only one chosen at random. "I suppose you know that, because you heard a low, steady murmur of voices?"

She said, "Well, there were people talking."

"You would have known that one of them was Mr. Thornton. Did you hear enough to enable you to guess who was the other?"

She said, "It was a man. That I do know."

"Mr. Peter talking to his father, then?"

"It didn't sound like him. Of course I can't rightly say, but it sounded to me more like the doctor."

"Dr. Hadly?"

"Well, he does come up sometimes and they talk for hours."

"They are great friends," said Cheviot. "So that is natural. As a matter of fact, I now remember something

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that was told me: it *was* Dr. Hadly who was there between 6 and 7. And they talked together about old times and someone they had both been very fond of."

He was startled, then, by her expression, which seemed to show something like incredulity. So he said, "Or perhaps I've got that wrong. That may have been another time."

She did not say anything to that: but the amazed expression remained on her face.

He said, "I can check it from my notes, of course. But perhaps you can save me that trouble. Did you hear enough to tell what kind of talk they were having?"

For a moment she was still silent. Then she said, "Well, if you ask me, they were having words."

With a great effort of self-control, Cheviot said, "Oh yes, it was that time. Of course. I remember now. They got into a disagreement and had quite a row."

She said, "Yes, they did. Storming at each other, I'd have called it."

"That's right," said Cheviot. "Silly of me to forget. But I still didn't remember what it was all about. Did you hear enough to pick that up?"

"No," she answered. "I didn't get the words, so I can't say what it was. But there was a row, that's certain. And Dr. Hadly doing most of it."

4

So Hadly had definitely lied, in his account of that interview with Thornton. What had he said, exactly, concerning the last part of that hour? "We went on talking, mostly about my sister . . . I kept him in play, rubbing in fond memories . . . I appealed to his deeper feelings." And it hadn't been like that at all: there had been a row,

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they had been "storming at each other," with "Hadly doing most of it."

Very well, then. All Hadly's story of that hour was a fake. A fake to cover the fact that there had been bad blood between him and Thornton—a fake to cover his motive for the murder.

That carried the case a long way further.

The next question was what that motive was. It just did not seem good enough to assume that it was no more than an altruistic devotion to a niece and a desire to help her to marry that twerp, Dudley Perm. There must be more in it than that.

In that case, the "altruistic devotion" was probably a façade, hiding the real motive. But what, what? What could that be?

5

Deep in thought, Cheviot got into his car, taking Sergeant Kimber with him, and again went in pursuit of Dr. Hadly. This time, he found him at his home.

"Hullo, Inspector. Still chasing around? And what can I do for you this time?"

Cheviot said, "I am going to have notes taken of this talk, doctor, so I must start by giving you the official warning that what you say may be taken down in writing and used in evidence."

Dr. Hadly looked considerably taken aback. Then he said, "Oh, just as you like, of course. But it sounds a bit formal. Still, any help I can give you——"

"Thanks. You have given me certain points of evidence in ordinary conversation. But if I am going to make use of them in court they have to be confirmed by you after that warning. So if you don't mind, I'll just run through

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the chief things you told me, as I remember them, and you can say whether or not my version is correct."

He then gave a summary of Dr. Hadly's account of his interview with Thornton and of what had preceded and followed it. At the end, he said, "Is that substantially correct?"

"Oh yes, that is exactly what happened."

"There is nothing you'd like to alter before it goes on the records as a statement?"

"Not a thing. I only hope it helps you. Though I really can't see what you can think that chat of ours has to do with John's death."

Ignoring that, Cheviot said, "Now, there are one or two points arising out of the statement. It seems a little odd, still, that you didn't give your niece the good news at the first possible moment. You are quite sure you didn't?"

"Of course. I told you I had to hurry away to an appointment."

"Oh yes. It must have been a quick one, though, as you didn't leave the Thornton's house till 7 and you had finished your dinner, as you told me, by 8."

Dr. Hadly laughed. "So you want to check that too? What a chap you are for not taking anybody's word! But I suppose it is your job. Well, the appointment was with one of my private patients, Mr. Somers of 85 Carfax Road. Go and see him, by all means—only for heaven's sake don't give him the impression that I am suspected of being a murderer! That wouldn't be good for the practice, you know."

"There is another little point," said Cheviot. "In a murder case, we always have to search the house—the scene of the crime, that is—and sometimes we notice things which call for explanation, without their having any direct bearing on the crime. Then we do some check-

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ing, just by way of routine. This is one of those questions. We found a bottle of sleeping draught which you supplied to Miss Nancy. I take it that you do your own dispensing?"

"Oh yes. It is the usual thing in country practices."

"Yes," said Cheviot. "You supplied that bottle after you heard of Mr. Thornton's death?"

The doctor stared at him for a second. Then he said, "You are very sharp, inspector. I suppose what you are boggling at, now, is that I must have brought it with me, already prepared, when I came round at midnight. Well, I did, of course. As soon as Peter had told me the terrible news, I knew I would have to produce a sedative for Nancy."

"That clears that point," said Cheviot, "except that I'd like to see the prescription."

"The devil you would! What is this, Inspector?"

"What was the drug you used?"

"Chloral hydrate. Aren't you going to tell me what you are getting at?"

"Not immediately," retorted Cheviot. "Have you prescribed chloral hydrate to anyone else in that house?"

"I use it fairly frequently, when it or something like it is called for. All doctors have 'favourite' prescriptions, you know. Let me see. I have never given it to Nancy till then, as far as I remember, and Peter always sleeps like a top. I haven't supplied it to Miss Corley—she is never ill anyway, just the sort of patient I like to have under the Health Service. But I did give chloral hydrate a couple of months or so ago to John Thornton—he was to keep it by him and take a dose if he needed it. That's all. Now will you satisfy my curiosity?"

"Certainly," said Cheviot. "John Thornton was stabbed.

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But wherf the knife entered his body he was already dead. He had been poisoned with chloral hydrate."

"I was half afraid you were going to say that," said Hadly. "I thought you must be, from the line of your questions. There's no doubt about it, I suppose? That is the post-mortem report, is it?"

"Yes."

"H'm. A nicer death than being stabbed, of course—one of the nicest forms of death there is, in fact. But stabbing a dead body is pretty gruesome. What on earth was the idea of that?"

"I don't know—yet," said Cheviot. "Dr. Hadly, you have stated to me—and now you have confirmed the statement—that after Mr. Thornton had agreed to Nancy's marriage you and he had a perfectly amicable chat, over memories of his wife, your main object being to keep him in a good humour. You are sure you don't want to alter that part of the statement?"

"Why should I? Of course I don't want to alter anything I've told you."

"Then it will surprise you that someone who overheard that talk describes it as 'a row' and says you were 'storming' at Mr. Thornton?"

"It surprises me very much, as far as that goes. It also makes me feel extremely indignant. Because, to put it quite bluntly, it is just a lie: a damnable lie, too."

"I see," said Cheviot. "That means that I have to believe either you or my other witness: I cannot possibly believe you both."

"Look here," said Hadly. "Let's 'quit stalling', as they say. You have asked me some very curious questions this evening—questions which, as far as I can see, show distrust of me. Now you are going further and practically

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calling me a liar. What is it all about? You are not seriously thinking that I killed John Thornton, are you?"

As he was not fully prepared to "quit stalling" at that moment, Cheviot said, "Naturally you are on my suspect list. Your position there gets stronger when statements of yours are contradicted by the statements of other people."

"So that's it, is it? Or part of it, at any rate, You've got a cagey look about you, inspector, which suggests a lack of complete frankness. . . . Well, except to protest my entire innocence, I don't quite know what to say: I'm not used to being accused of murder, you know. I think I must say that if I had to be accused of murdering someone I would rather it had been anyone on earth, almost, than John Thornton. But that is not what you want, of course. Well, could you make the position a bit clearer? What exactly have you against me?"

"I don't have to go into that, at this stage," Cheviot retorted. "But I will tell you there is no evidence to support your statement that Thornton completely changed his mind and agreed to the marriage—a statement which even you didn't make to anyone at the time. There is no satisfactory explanation of your withholding that news, nor is there an explanation of how you filled up half an hour or more, after getting Thornton's consent—except a story which is flatly contradicted by another witness. And if I accept the statement of that other witness rather than your own, it appears that there is no truth in your contention that you and Thornton were on the friendliest of terms—on the contrary, you appear to have been at loggerheads, to the point of violence."

"Really!" said Dr. Hadly. "Could you tell me when and how I am supposed to have murdered him? You can't know very much about chloral hydrate, if you think I poured a lethal dose down his throat."

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"He ate a meal at 8.35. The poison was in that meal—probably soaked into two sausage rolls. If you had slipped down to the larder——"

"I see. And if I say I didn't, you won't accept that because you can't check the statement, there is no confirmation of it. Well, you ought to know that it is impossible to prove a negative anyway. So there is not much I can do about that. And the sound advice of Mr. Samuel Weller, Senior, doesn't apply in this case. So what it mainly turns on is the lie told about me by this other witness of yours. That is Miss Corley, I presume?"

Cheviot said, "Why do you presume that?"

"Peter and Nancy were to give me a clear run, so they wouldn't have been within hearing distance. Besides, the idea would have seemed as preposterous to them as it does to me, so if they had had any suspicion that I had quarrelled with their father they would have spoken to me about it, rather than to you. So there is only Miss Corley. I suppose the suggestion is that she was in her room next door. Well, has she given you chapter and verse of it all? Is it just that there was 'a row' or did she repeat remarks of mine? What am I supposed to have been 'storming'—that was your word, wasn't it?—'storming' about?"

With sudden frankness, Cheviot said, "I should very much like to know. I don't expect you will tell me, but I can assure you I shall find out eventually."

"I don't doubt that you would if there was anything to find," replied Hadly. "But there isn't, of course. This is all nonsense, inspector. John and I had no more than a quiet, very friendly conversation."

"Then why should Miss Corley have told a lie about it?"

"Heaven knows. I mayn't suggest, I suppose, that you misunderstood her? Failing that, the probability is that she

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has a sensational mind—she reads detective stories, I believe—and she might have wanted to distinguish herself by giving you some melodramatic evidence. That could lead to her getting her name in the Sunday papers. You've no idea, probably, of the lengths to which people of that type will go to get a little personal publicity."

Cheviot said, "It is your word against hers, then."

"And she is to be regarded as an unprejudiced witness, whereas I, as the accused, would tell the first lie that occurred to me? But I'll try to give you something better than a mere denial. Your accusation, I take it, is that during the first part of that hour I went downstairs and laid poison for John, and that after that I returned to his room and stormed at him. Is that the idea?"

"It is, exactly."

"Well, doctors are supposed to be of some intelligence—not completely moronic, at any rate. Can you tell me what would be the sense in storming at a man, when you knew for an absolute certainty that he would be dead within the next four hours or so?"

CHAPTER EIGHT

PART OF THE TRUTH?

1

HOWEVER unwillingly, Cheviot had to admit to himself that Dr. Hadly's argument had some weight in it.

He hardly knew why he had not thought of it himself. Moreover, if the doctor had laid poison for Thornton, knowing that he would take it and die that same evening, he would surely have had every reason for filling the next half-hour with quiet conversation, friendly conversation, of the type he said he had had. For one thing, "a row" might have destroyed Thornton's appetite for sausage rolls, so that he would have decided to miss his dinner. And, apart from that, Hadly would have known that there was the chance of Miss Corley being in her room next door and overhearing either much or little—at least enough to enable her to say exactly what she had said, and thus to cast suspicion on him.

On the other hand, the case against Hadly, until that snag came up, had been decidedly promising. How, then, could the snag be got over?

2

If the case against Hadly was to go on, there was still the original difficulty—what had been his motive?

With that question—amongst others—in his mind, Cheviot went to see whether Dudley Perm had returned

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from wherever he had been spending the day. He had and he opened the door himself.

"Oh. It's you," he said. "Two of you, this time, eh? Does that mean handcuffs?"

"We are always ready to produce them when they are wanted," Cheviot retorted. "In the meantime, I would like to talk to you. First of all I want you to tell me who, besides yourself, didn't like Mr. Thornton?"

Dudley grinned at him. "Tricky, aren't you? If I answer that by producing a list, you'll think I have admitted to disliking him myself. But I didn't. He wasn't quite my bit of meat, the difference between us being that I wanted money in order to spend it and he wanted money because it was money. Apart from that, and the fact that he didn't think me an eligible suitor for his daughter, we got on all right: that is to say we were always civil to one another even if we didn't exactly hug and kiss."

Cheviot said, "Quite so. And who did actually dislike him? Who would be on that list you spoke of?"

"No one, actually, even if that sounds like a contradiction. He wasn't a bit popular in the town, but then he didn't want to be, so it didn't matter. He was one of those negligible people who aren't worth disliking."

"I've been told," Cheviot suggested, "that his only real friend was Dr. Hadly."

"I daresay Hadly came as near to being a friend as anyone did. But that's not saying an awful lot. Actually, Hadly's interest is in Nancy, with Peter as runner-up. Mr. Thornton was only an unavoidable appendage to them."

"Unavoidable but sometimes resented, perhaps. Would it astonish you if I said I had had a report that Hadly and Mr. Thornton sometimes stormed at each other?"

"It would rather. I could believe that Hadly stormed at

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old Thornton, but not that Thornton stormed back. He wasn't that type. He'd be damned obstinate, with a face like a mule, but he wouldn't kick."

"I see," said Cheviot. "Hadn't Miss Corley said that Dr. Hadly 'did most of it?' Now about yourself. Were you at the Thorntons' house at any time yesterday before 8.30 p.m.?"

Dudley looked surprised at the question but he answered immediately. "No. I spent the whole day at Hastings. A revue chorus was having a day by the sea and I got some first-rate shots. Plenty of witnesses to that alibi, if it is one: because that kind of girl welcomes chaps like me—wonderful thing, publicity, you know—and I had a fine time. As a matter of fact, I picked three of the prettiest and gave them a lift home, leaving Hastings at 5 and getting them to the theatre just in time for their show. Then I had a snack at Bo's Bar—and I'm known there, luckily—and drove down to Carhampton, getting here just before 8. After that, I was with Nancy and Peter. Now that is all a copper-bottomed alibi, I can assure you. Though," he added, "I'm damned if I know what you want it for."

3

If that was substantiated, it did not look as if Dudley Perm was a suspect for the poisoning.

There was, of course, Miss Corley as a possibility. It could be argued, if Hadly was innocent, that she was trying to shift suspicion. But what on earth could be her motive?

Failing her—and ruling out Peter and Nancy—there was nobody left except Hadly and Janet Jones.

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Oh hell! What a case it was! And as yet not a single one of the mysteries in it had been solved. The broken window, the bolted door. . . . And, of course, the presence of Janet Jones. . . . If only he could get things a little straighter by persuading her, at last, to tell the truth!

He went back to the house and sent a constable to fetch the girl for yet another interview. But what, he wondered, was he to try this time? Threats had failed, and cajolery had failed. Short of downright bribery and corruption, what was there left?

She was still indignant when she came.

"I'm getting tired of this," she cried. "It's pretty boring in that cell, you know. There are 541 dirty spots on the walls: I've counted them seven times, and it always comes to the same number. And there are 18 cobwebs, three with spiders and the rest without. If you must keep me, in spite of Magna Carta, couldn't I be put into another cell with a fresh lot of fascinating amusements?"

He began, "If you would tell me the truth——"

But that didn't stop her. "And there's another thing. I've been clamouring, whenever I see anyone, for a pair of pyjamas, sleeping in one's day things not being frightfully healthy. Only they haven't any of my size, they say. And of course I haven't any money, except 3s. 7½d., all the rest having gone in my rucksack, so I can't get them to buy me anything——"

Cheviot said again, "If you would tell me the truth. As I have told you, I know now that you were not brought here by Mr. Thornton—at any rate unless you came before 8.30. So I want to know how and why you came. If only you would clear up that point——"

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" she cried. "I've answered that lots of times. I was brought here, just as I told you. And

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the man^f who brought me here was that man who was in the hall this morning—some doctor you said, didn't you?"

"And I have told you," said Cheviot, "that that is completely impossible."

"It can't be impossible," she retorted. "You must have got things wrong somewhere. I can't have been mistaken about his voice and the shape of his head, so it is only the moustache you are boggling at, and if he could invent a Mrs. Chisholm I don't see why he shouldn't have bought a false moustache."

"He has a cast-iron alibi," said Cheviot, a little wearily, "from 9.10 till 10.30. So unless you are going to make out that your watch was wrong——"

"I expect it is," she said. "In fact, it is quite certain to have stopped altogether, not having been wound since last Friday night. Though I really don't see what that has to do with it."

With sudden alertness, Cheviot said, "You are not wearing a watch?"

"I never do on hikes. Too much chance of getting it broken."

"Then,—then how did you know it was 9.10 when you turned into the drive of this house?"

"By the clock on the dashboard of the car, of course," she answered.

For one astonished second, Cheviot cursed himself for a fool—the fool of all the ages. How on earth, with his

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passion for checking, could he have left that one point, of all points, uncorroborated? He had suspected this girl's veracity all along, and yet he had glibly accepted that one statement, while regarding every single other thing she had told him as a lie! It was easy to say that if she had not been wearing that long-sleeved pullover—or whatever the garment was called—he would have seen that she had no watch on her wrist and would immediately have queried her statement about the time. But it wasn't that. It was just—damn it!—that he had been careless, accepting the statement because it was not one of the important points on which he doubted her.

Not important, indeed! Why, it altered everything.

Dr. Hadly had said—he remembered it now—that he had made a round of visits between 8 and 9.10 but he had not given any details. So that had not been checked. And what, in heaven's name, was to have prevented Dr. Hadly, if he had murder in mind, from putting back his dashboard clock an hour, or an hour and a half? Then—why then he could have been at the 'Thorntons' house before 8.30.

Though why, in that case, he should have brought the girl with him——

But this was not a moment for thought, or for worrying about possible snags. Cheviot jumped to his feet, said, "Wait for me here," to Janet Jones, and dashed from the room. He shouted for Sergeant Kimber and ran to his car. As Kimber followed him out of the house, he said, "Oh, for God's sake hurry up, man. Don't linger about as if we had all day before us." And Sergeant Kimber, who knew those signs only too well, said, "Yes, sir. Certainly, sir," and got into the car beside him.

As he drove towards Dr. Hadly's house, Cheviot decided that he hardly knew what he was going there for—what he was going to say to the doctor. Perhaps this discovery—if it was one, which didn't follow, as he now realized—wouldn't alter anything. Certainly, it could hardly increase the likelihood of Hadly being the poisoner: it could give him another opportunity for the poison-laying, only that wasn't needed, because he had a good enough one in any case. And it did not overcome the difficulty, because although the poison-laying would then come after the alleged "storming", instead of before it, that quarrel or whatever it was would still be after murder was in the man's mind, and when the time of Thornton's death was fixed, so it was just as "moronic" as ever.

On the other hand, there was just a chance that at least one of the many mysteries of the case was now going to be cleared up. For had not Miss Corley said that she heard the smashing of the window "soon after half past eight," whereas Janet Jones, who was thought up till now not to have arrived till 9.15, had heard it too. Cheviot remembered that at the time he had put that discrepancy down to inaccuracy on the housekeeper's part—incredibly foolish of him, that had been! Why should not Miss Corley—who now seemed to be becoming the major witness in this case—have been right? If she was, then there was confirmation of the idea that the clock on the dashboard of Hadly's car had been an hour fast: a thing that, in the car of a doctor in particular, could only happen by deliberate action.

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6

Dr. Hadly said, "What, again?" when Cheviot and Sergeant Kimber marched into his consulting room. "Does this mean a fresh development, inspector?"

"It does," said Cheviot. "And I must remind you that you have already received the official warning."

"Well?"

"You told me this morning that you were out on a round of visits from 8 till 9.10 last night, and that from 9.10 till 10.30 you were at a nursing home. I had not asked you about the time between 8 and 9, but you volunteered an alibi of a sort, though it was one without details and therefore uncheckable. Now, I find that that does have to be checked, so I need those details."

Dr. Hadly said, "And why is checking now necessary for that particular time?"

"I didn't bother about it before, because Miss Jones was positive that the time when she was picked up by a man with a car—a man, you will remember, whom she identified as you—was not until about 9. Now, it appears that she was not wearing her watch, so she only knew the time from the clock in the car. And of course that clock might have been an hour fast, which would make all the difference. The time when she was picked up would then be 8 or just after, instead of 9 or just after."

"Unlikely that a clock would be a whole hour wrong, and exactly an hour."

"Still, it might have happened," Cheviot insisted. "The mere possibility makes it necessary that I should go into alibis for the hour earlier."

Dr. Hadly said, "Really? You say 'alibis' but apparently

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you mean mine in particular. You seriously think that necessary? Or to put it differently, I am genuinely under suspicion?"

Having no wish to answer such a direct question at that moment, Cheviot said, "Aren't we wasting time? If you will give me particulars of your alibi for that hour——"

"I can assure you," said Hadly, "that it is impossible for my clock to have been wrong like that. I have to have that clock right, to keep my appointments."

A little impatiently—because this surely raised the idea that the doctor was hedging—Cheviot said, "A clock could have been put wrong deliberately, for one evening, and then put right again."

"Oh, come, inspector. That is a very serious accusation. I really don't think you ought to make it. You appear to have wild suspicions against me, but at any rate you have no proof—you couldn't possibly have any proof——"

Cheviot said, "Oh, that's quite all right. There'll be proof and to spare, if you give me a list of calls you made during that hour and I find you did not make them, or that they didn't fill the hour. You have been identified by Miss Jones. Your repudiation of that depends on an alibi. You have a sound one from 9.10 onwards. But if the time I am interested in could have been between 8.10 and 9.10, and you give me an alibi for that time—and the alibi turns out to be false——"

He stopped abruptly, because of the strange expression which had come on to the doctor's face.

"Well?" he said.

Dr. Hadly said, "All right, inspector. I thought I had bluffed you by giving a sound alibi from 9.10 onwards, and mentioning casually that I had one from 8 onwards as well. But it seems that I haven't succeeded. A pity, but

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there it is. In that case, I cannot do anything but surrender. I have no alibi for between 8 and 9.10."

7

Cheviot said, "Do I understand that you are confessing to murder?"

"You had better hear all about it. I have had your warning, your sergeant will take notes, no doubt, and then, if you wish I will sign the statement. That's the correct procedure, isn't it? You see," he added in a very matter of fact tone, "a few weeks ago, I decided that I had to kill John Thornton."

"Why?"

Dr. Hadly shrugged his shoulders. "If you don't mind, I think I had better tell the story in my own way. You need to know the facts, I'm sure, rather than to hear of my mental processes. So I will start with the basic fact that I decided, for reasons which seemed to me perfectly adequate, to kill John. Only I didn't think it necessary, in the circumstances, that I should pay any penalty. Neither, come to that, did I want anyone else to pay the penalty. In particular, naturally, I did not want either Nancy or Peter to get into trouble over it. I want you to realize that, because it was the basis of all my plan. I was going to kill John in such a way—or so I thought—that neither I nor anyone else could be charged with the crime."

Cheviot said, "It hasn't worked out that way." He ought not, he knew, to have said it: it was much too much like gloating. But the temptation was irresistible.

"Hasn't it?" said Hadly. "We'll see. But as a matter of fact, a lot of things haven't turned out as I planned them. Well, I will go on. You see, there were a lot of difficulties

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in what P was planning. For one thing, John had to be killed in his own home—he seldom leaves it. And for another thing, John had so few acquaintances that the suspect list was bound to be a very short one—it could hardly include anyone except Peter, Nancy, Dudley Perm, Miss Corley and I, and Miss Corley hardly counted because no one would be able to think of a motive for her.”

The doctor was silent for a moment. Then he said, “You probably feel, inspector, that there are some actions that are a good deal worse than murder: and in that case you will think very badly of me, unless I make things quite clear to you.”

Cheviot said, “I hardly think that matters. I am here as an official, and I only want the facts.”

“Still, I would like you to understand. Believe it or not, I am a kind-hearted man, with no wish to cause suffering. Even in the case of John, I meant the end to be very quick. And in my plan to prevent trouble coming to anyone I cared about—or to myself—I didn’t want anyone hurt. On the other hand, nobody knows better than a doctor that worries and little troubles abound, and one gets just sufficiently hardened to feel that one more on anyone’s shoulders wouldn’t matter. I hope that is clear: I didn’t want anyone endangered, but I didn’t mind causing someone a little temporary inconvenienc.

Cheviot said, “You are making this statement by your own wish, and I don’t want to interrupt: but isn’t all this a little off the point?”

“It is very much to the point,” Hadly retorted. “My plan was to draw a red-herring across the trail—in fact to produce a scapegoat. But I did not want—in fact, I did not intend—that scapegoat to be in any danger of suffering the last penalties of the law. I could not help it if a little inconvenience was caused to someone, but I did not mean

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there to be more than that. You see, what I was planning was to shield myself and other people by producing some innocent person who would look guilty, but against whom nothing could possibly be proved. I thought that then the police would be too busy to trouble overmuch about me and my friends. I wanted, in fact, to present the police with one of those cases which go eventually onto the 'unsolvable' list because they feel quite sure that a certain person is guilty but cannot do anything about it because they haven't the evidence on which any jury would convict."

8

Cheviot said, "You are talking about Miss Jones, I suppose?"

"Actually, I never asked her name. But if that is the girl who said she recognized me—yes. But don't let us jump ahead, if you don't mind. It is important that you should grasp the whole of this. Having made my plan, I next made certain preparations. I went up to town one day and bought a false moustache, R.A.F. type: I'll give you the address of the shop, so that you can do your checking. I took the dashboard off my car, so as to find out how to get at the works of the clock. And I arranged my calls for the whole of this week—when I knew that Peter and Nancy would be out in the evenings, at rehearsals in the Village Hall—so that I should have an hour free each evening, from 8 till 9, with a fixed appointment at the end of the time.

"All that was easy. The difficulty was going to be in finding a suitable scapegoat. It had to be a chance visitor to this district. It also had to be someone who could be inveigled into John's house—and that, in this wicked world,

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seemed to imply that it must be a girl. In fact, by and large, the best bet seemed to be to find a young girl out hiking.

"But there was one other difficulty—a really tremendous one. It had to be a girl without a watch, who would thus take my word for it when I told her the time and pointed to the dashboard clock.

"Actually, I was lucky about that. I chose the cross-roads as a suitable spot for waiting about: it is eight miles from here, deserted in the evening, but on two roads used by hikers. For the first two evenings, I thought I was not going to be lucky at all: most of the hikers who came along were in pairs or parties, and the few lone ones all wore wrist watches. But last night, at a few minutes past 8, a girl came along alone, and she looked exactly the right type. For one thing, she was obviously lost—she looked a bit despairingly at her map, and then up at the signpost. I couldn't tell about the watch, though, for she was wearing a long-sleeved pullover. But then she produced a torch out of her rucksack and held it above her head to make sure of the place names on the signpost. And—this is where the luck came in—she held the torch in her left hand, and as she stretched up, her sleeve slipped back and showed that she was not wearing a wrist watch.

"So then I made myself agreeable to her, told her she was a long way off her route, and offered her a lift. She fell for it beautifully, and that was that. At any rate I was over the first hurdle."

Against his better judgment, and simply because for some time his feelings had been getting the better of him as he listened to this astonishing story, Cheviot said, "You really mean all this? You aren't pulling my leg?"

"Really, inspector! How could I be? Doesn't it fit far

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too closely with things you already know—and which I couldn't possibly know of if this wasn't the truth?"

"But——" For the moment Cheviot was reduced to stammering. "But—but you really are so—so horribly callous that you could trick a—an innocent girl into that position?"

Dr. Hadly laughed. It was, Cheviot thought, an extremely strange laugh. "Didn't I tell you you would regard some things as worse than murder? You do, you see. I felt sure you would, because you are soft-hearted—a trifle sentimental, in fact—behind your official façade. So am I, actually, though that is beside the point. But you can hear that I preferred John Thornton to be dead, without turning a hair, while this account of a trick on a rather pretty girl makes you hot under the collar. Silly, isn't it, but perfectly human and natural. Actually, that is why I took the trouble to explain my line of reasoning to you. You see, I am a curious character: a sentimentalist with a scientific training. I am quite willing to give a little pain to one person in order to save another person from a lot of pain—provided the balance is well on the side of good, I don't draw back from what would normally be regarded as evil."

Cheviot said, indignantly, "The person you are trying to save from pain is yourself. And you don't mind whom you hurt in the process!"

Dr. Hadly smiled again. "It isn't quite like that," he said. "But perhaps you will be happier if you become official again. Shall I go on with my confession?"

Cheviot pulled himself together. Damn it, he thought, it didn't do, in his job, to have human feelings. But this man was mad, anyway: absolutely a raving lunatic who wouldn't stop at anything.

"Oh yes. Go on, do," he said. And he said it harshly.

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"I drove the girl to John's house," Dr. Hadly continued. "Just before we got there, I produced a story of wanting to call on a friend, pointed out the time as 9.10—she swallowed that at a gulp—and drew up at the door without giving her a chance to protest. Then I left her in the car. I expect she has told you that my leaving her like that gave her confidence in my honourable intentions, but actually that was not my idea at all: I had to take a chance on her running away, because it was essential that I should do some scouting.

"And it was just as well I did. I let myself in with my latchkey—this was just before 8.30—and I realized at once that Miss Corley was in the kitchen. That didn't suit my book at all—I had to hide in the hall cupboard. But after a few minutes, I saw her look into the sitting-room for a moment, and then go upstairs: and I also saw John come down and go into the kitchen. I remained hidden, of course, though I was very impatient. Then I saw John go up again——"

Cheviot said, "Carrying anything?"

"Oh yes. A plate with two sausage rolls on it, and a cup of coffee. I gave him time to get settled into his room—and I counted on Miss Corley being also settled in hers, for the evening—and then I went outside and told the girl a tale about the woman who lived there having asked her in."

"Mrs. Chisholm?"

"Yes, ~~that's~~ the name I used. I took the girl into the sitting-room and chatted to her for a bit, chiefly to settle her down because it would have ruined my plan if she had run away as soon as she was left alone. Of course, I wanted her to stay till Peter and Nancy returned, a matter of two hours or so, and that was a bit tricky. But I reckoned it would take some time for her to guess that I

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wasn't coming back, and longer still for her to be sure of it, and I thought that when she did get to the point of deciding to quit she would be stymied by the fact that her rucksack, which she had left in my car, had disappeared. I hoped that she would be in quite a quandary about that, not absolutely certain she hadn't brought it into the house, or I hadn't, and that more time would be used in her searching for it. My experience, you know, is that girls get into a flap about losing their possessions."

Cheviot said, drily, "It seems to have worked, anyhow. What time was it when you left her?"

"I don't know, exactly. About a quarter or ten to nine, I expect. Anyhow, I made an excuse about going to look for 'Mrs. Chisholm,' and then I switched off the hall lights—just to puzzle the girl and delay her, when she came out to look for me—and I crept upstairs to John's room. I had to be very quiet, you know, for fear of Miss Corley. I went into the room, and then I had the most terrific shock. For John was dead."

Cheviot said, "Wait a moment. Am I to take this statement as washing out all you have previously said in answer to my questions?"

"Only where it contradicts those answers. But anyhow, this is the full and true statement."

"I see," said Cheviot. "Then I take it you expected Thornton to be dying, but not yet dead?"

"Dying? Good heavens no. It was the surprise of my life."

"Then you are still saying that you didn't lay poison for him between 6 and 7?"

"Of course I didn't. I didn't lay any poison for him at all."

"I see," said Cheviot, again. "And the talk you had

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with him between 6.30 and 7—are you still maintaining that was quiet and peaceful?”

“Entirely. It was exactly as I told you. We talked about his wife.”

“Then the animosity which provides you with your motive for wanting to kill him didn’t show itself during that last interview?”

“I haven’t talked of animosity,” said Hadly. “There wasn’t any. We got along very smoothly together.”

“But for all that——”

“For all that, I thought he ought to get out of this world. As he didn’t do it, I decided to help him. That, really, is all it comes to.”

“You can’t expect me to be satisfied with that.”

Dr. Hadly shrugged. “Frankly, I am not concerned with satisfying you. I am merely telling you what happened last night. Shall I go on with that? As I said, I found him dead. And as far as I could tell from the briefest of inspections, he had died from narcotic poisoning. It could have been suicide, of course, but—well, to be frank, I didn’t think he would have had the sense to do that. And there wasn’t a farewell note on his desk. So the chances were that it was murder. A thing, I must admit, that I had not for a moment expected.”

Cheviot said, “Wait a moment. You say you looked for a letter on his desk. What exactly was on his desk?”

“His body covered more than half of it. There was a cup and saucer and a plate. Nothing else that I saw.”

“An empty cup and plate?”

“Yes. Apart from dregs and crumbs.”

“Very well. Now go on.”

“Well, it did not suit me at all that John should have been murdered by poison. I don’t mean that I wanted him to live: I didn’t, as I’ve told you. But poisoning was

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tricky, there being not much necessary relation between the time of death and the time of the laying of the poison. You'll understand that, of course, with your experience. The poison was presumably in John's supper: but it might have been put there at pretty well any time—while Nancy and Peter were at home and without the alibi provided for them by that rehearsal, or during the hour when I was in the house during the evening. Things couldn't be left like that, obviously: so I knew that I should have to fake something."

"Yes?"

"I was wearing gloves all this time, of course, so there was no danger there. But I hadn't much time, because the appointment I had fixed for myself at about 9 was to bring a baby into this world—a much more worthwhile operation, in my opinion, than dealing with someone who has just left it. So I made up my mind very quickly. First, I took a lot of papers out of John's filing cabinet, so as to suggest a false motive for his murder. Then I carried out my original plan, just as I would have done if he had still been alive. That is to say, I drove the stiletto into his heart."

Cheviot said, "What stiletto?"

"Oh, didn't I mention that? No, I don't believe I did. Well, you see, I picked it up in a junk shop in Italy, several years ago. After I'd bought it, I decided I didn't like it much, so I chucked it into my suitcase and later put it away in a drawer at home. I am a widower, you know, without children and so no one knows I possess it."

"I see," said Cheviot. "A very useful weapon for murder, in fact."

"Admirable," said Hadly. "But don't lose sight of the fact that I haven't committed murder. Whatever I may

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have thought of doing, all I have actually done is to stick a knife into a dead body."

Cheviot said, "H'm. You are at least an accessory after the fact of murder."

"I suppose I am—technically. And no doubt I have obstructed the police in the execution of their duties. But I doubt if you would get very far with a charge on either of those counts. You would first have to prove, wouldn't you, that I was shielding the murderer? And as I haven't the slightest idea who the murderer is——"

"We'll see about all that," said Cheviot. "Tell me what else you did."

"I took the plate, the cup and the saucer, taking care that no crumbs fell on the floor, and I washed them in the bathroom and dried them on a towel. I went to the kitchen and put them away with the rest of the clean crockery. Then I crept out of the house and drove away in my car—just in time to start on that baby at 9.10."

"You didn't stop to break a window?"

"I did. Thanks for reminding me. It had been part of my original plan, you see, to leave a broken window, so as to suggest that the girl had broken in by that means. I thought that would start suspicions of her and make her story that she was brought to the house by a man she couldn't produce seem very questionable. That was the whole idea, you know: that she should look as guilty as possible, and appear to be lying to save her skin—and yet that, since ~~no~~ connection between her and John Thornton could be traced, it would be quite impossible to prove anything against her."

"And you say you adhered to that plan, after you found that Thornton had been murdered by someone else?"

"Of course," said Hadly. "It had become more essential than ever."

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Cheviot said, "Well, now I want certain questions answered. The most important concerns your motive. What was it?"

"I am afraid that is my business."

"It is very definitely mine," Cheviot retorted.

"Oh, I don't think so. There is no crime in merely 'wanting to kill'."

"If you want me to believe this very improbable story of yours, you have got to substantiate it."

"I have given you every detail," Hadly answered, "so there is plenty for you to check. But the reason for my actions—that, I must repeat, is my business only. But I will say this about it. My motive was a purely personal one, and there is no chance that it was shared by anyone else. Therefore the motive of the person who actually murdered John Thornton must be a completely different one from mine."

"I see," said Cheviot. He nearly added, "That is going to help me a mighty lot, isn't it?" But instead he said, "I will leave that point for the moment. Give me the papers which you say you took from Thornton's room."

"Sorry. I burnt them and put the ashes down the lavatory."

"Why?"

"You might have come here with a search-warrant. They would have been a bit incriminating."

"H'm. Give me Miss Jones's rucksack."

"Ah yes. That has been a worry to me, because that kind of thing cannot be destroyed at all easily. You'll find it down a disused well, about two and half miles beyond

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Brackshaw. I'll draw you a sketch-map to enable you to find it."

"Very well," said Cheviot. He stood up. "I am not putting you under arrest at the moment. But I am sure you will realize the hopelessness of trying to run away."

"Oh, I wouldn't dream of doing anything so silly," said Hadly.

CHAPTER NINE

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1

MISS JONES's rucksack was quickly found. There was thus definite proof of that part of Dr. Hadly's story: the man might be insane, or he might be only a remarkably callous murderer, but he had certainly decoyed Miss Jones as a scapegoat for himself. And in that case——

Cheviot's mind was by that time in such a whirl that when he returned to the Thorntons' house and found Miss Jones still in the study, waiting for him, he was quite astonished. He said, "Oh, are you still here?"

"Well, I like that!" she retorted. "I thought I was practically under arrest, and that if I walked out—though there didn't seem to be anything to stop me—there'd be bloodhounds after me."

He said, "I'm afraid I owe you an apology."

"Oh, there's no need to be all that polite. Besides, if it is a choice between waiting here and being in that cell, I'd much rather be here. The chairs are more comfortable. Can't I stay here a bit longer?"

"The apology is for detaining you," he explained. "I have just been talking to the man who brought you here. He told me all about it, and I have obtained proof that he was telling the truth—at any rate about you."

"Isn't that nice?" she said. "Was it that doctor? And why did he do it? Can I get damages off him for abduction?"

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"I'd rather you didn't do anything of the sort for the moment—not at any rate till I have finished this case."

"I don't really want to," she answered. "I haven't a mercenary mind, and I don't think I'd like all the publicity. Though I'd love to tell him what I think of him. How about my rucksack?"

"You shall have it, but I don't think it will be of much use to you," Cheviot said. "Or the things in it either. You see, it has been in water, at the bottom of a well, for the past twenty-four hours."

2

Cheviot sat alone in the little study and thought, and thought, and thought. In the old days, in a predicament of this sort, he would have lain in a hot bath, enervating his body and thus stimulating his brain. But that, though he did consider it, would have been awkward in these circumstances. So he could only sit and think, without artificial aids.

There was now, he felt, only one way by which he could get at the truth—he would have to find the motive for this murder.

Since Hadly was—apparently—being so very frank, and in the process was putting himself in jeopardy of serious criminal charges, why was he holding out on that one point? Couldn't he see that that was bound to bring the whole of his belated "honesty" into question? Must it not mean either that he was shielding someone else—a habit of his, according to his own account—or else that the truth about his motive would invalidate all he had said?

Apart from that, there was one point in his story which did arouse suspicion. He had produced the rucksack, to

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confirm that part of his story which concerned Miss Jones—the part that was certainly true. But he had not produced the papers he took from Thornton's room. He said he had burnt them. If so, he had been in a great hurry to burn them, and even to destroy the evidence that anything had been burnt. Of course, that could be, as he said, because their presence in his house would be evidence against him. But it could equally well be that he wanted them burnt.

And, come to that, why had he taken them? If he knew that their presence would endanger himself, he must have had a strong reason for taking them. The reason he gave was that their disappearance "would suggest a false motive for the murder": and yet, as Cheviot remembered, when questioned earlier about the filing cabinets, he had made no attempt to establish that—on the contrary, he had explained that one cabinet was new and would be "fairly empty."

So that explanation of why he had emptied the cabinet did not seem to hold water.

Thus it did seem possible that Hadly was being very cunning in making a confession of minor crime, in order to escape the penalties of the major one. Clearly, he would have said nothing at all if suspicion had kept away from himself: but when the pace became too hot—— Like George Washington: Cheviot had always felt that there must have been something much more serious than the cutting down of a cherry tree, which young George managed to keep covered by his sanctimonious confession!

3

On the other hand, it did not follow that Dr. Hadly had not told the exact truth and the whole of it. Suspicion was

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all very well, but there were dangers in having a suspicious mind. With the certainty of a charge of being an accessory hanging over him if he was found out, the doctor might very reasonably have destroyed evidence. He might have taken those papers, in a hurry and flurry, with the idea of creating a false scent, and then have seen that that scent would never be very strong and anyhow would hardly lead the police to a scapegoat who had no possible connection with the murdered man—it might even lead to suspicion of Peter or Nancy: and therefore it might have seemed better to drop the idea. And to get rid of the papers as soon as possible.

And, of course, there was still the contradiction between the stories of Hadly and Miss Corley. If Hadly's intention had been, as he now said, to kill Thornton by stabbing him, there was no point in having a row with him first: and the stabbing was premeditated, with arrangements made long before 6 o'clock that evening. So the consistent story, as far as that went, was Hadly's, of a designedly peaceful interview to put Thornton off his guard.

But in that case, Miss Corley had lied, deliberately. Why should she have done that?

4

Cheviot therefore broke off his session of thought and went to find the housekeeper.

She was in the kitchen, preparing her supper: and the sight of that—more particularly the smell of it—reminded Cheviot that he had been without food all day. Now that the idea was brought to him, he was really extraordinarily hungry. He was even tempted to break off from his case and drive home, where no doubt Kathleen would provide

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him with something much more satisfactory than anything he could get in the local hotel: only she would provide other things as well—very wonderful and desirable things, which would distract his mind completely from his case. That wouldn't do. As he had found already, in the past six months, business and pleasure—particularly the pleasures of married life—had to be kept severely apart. Particularly when a case seemed to be nearing its climax and concentration on it was essential.

But really it was very difficult to concentrate, against that appetizing smell of food.

He said, "Something else from the private store?"

"A bit of jugged hare," she said, "left over from lunch. I'm hotting it up. Don't you interrupt me now, I'm going to have my supper."

"I can talk to you while you eat," he suggested.

"There's no objection to that, I suppose," she said. "Though I do like my meals in peace and quiet. Have you had a meal yourself?"

"Oh—I don't bother about food when I'm working."

"Well, you can't starve," she said. "I've a bit to spare if you want it. Then we wouldn't have to talk till afterwards."

For a second he wondered about poison. But of course she wouldn't have the nerve! And she couldn't have foreseen this—he could take care that nothing happened while she dished up the food. He said, "That's very good of you."

It was her suggestion that they should eat in her sitting-room. "I can't have a gentleman eating in my kitchen,"

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she said. So they went upstairs (after Cheviot had carefully watched the preparation of the meal) and sat down to the pleasantest of suppers.

They ate in silence. Cheviot enjoyed his meal, but he doubted more and more whether Miss Corley was enjoying hers. This joint if not convivial meal had been her suggestion, but once it had started she seemed to be regretting the invitation. It certainly appeared that she had something on her mind.

Suddenly, when her plate was cleared, she said, "If you want me to talk now, I don't so very much mind, but I'd be easier if you'd tell me something first. It's a worry, not knowing what's happening all the time. And how much you've found out. If you've found out anything, that is."

Cheviot said, "I've found out a lot."

"You know who did it?" she cried. "Well, that's a mercy, I must say. It's been getting on my nerves, it has. You really know, for sure?"

"I certainly know who put the knife into Mr. Thornton's back," said Cheviot. "There's not the slightest doubt about that."

She seemed to be immensely relieved. So much so, indeed, that he was rather puzzled about it. At a venture, he said, "You knew all along, didn't you?"

"I didn't care," she answered, "so long as it was someone. Well, I don't mean that, of course," she went on rather hurriedly. "I mean. I didn't care who it was, so long as he was found out. It isn't right, is it, that people should do that kind of thing and not be found out? I mean, it isn't safe, for any of us."

"I see," said Cheviot. He didn't see, of course, but he felt that at this rate he might possibly begin to see, before so very long. He said, "But that hardly answers my question. Did you know who stabbed Mr. Thornton?"

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"I didn't *know*. But there were some people it couldn't be, and somebody it might be. If you start with quarrelling——"

It was not very difficult to sound surprised.

"Oh, do you mean Dr. Hadly? But he didn't quarrel with Mr. Thornton. I know you heard something which suggested it, but it appears that you were mistaken."

"I certainly wasn't," she retorted. "At it hammer and tongs, he was, and for half an hour on end."

"And yet you didn't hear a single word—you've no idea what that quarrel was about?"

"No. There's nothing I can say—nothing that you might call definite. But Mr. Thornton was a man you could quarrel with, if you were minded that way. He said things nasty, and if you didn't like it you could take him up."

Cheviot said, "Really? That is hardly the impression I had about him. But you ought to know: you have had your own troubles with him."

"Only once or twice," she murmured.

"I know you've told me something about it," he said mendaciously, "but I've forgotten the details. You read some papers he left lying about, didn't you?"

"Not on purpose. Something just caught my eye."

"Oh, was that it? Do you know, Miss Corley, I am remembering now. You told me before that the trouble was only that you had moved some papers and not put them back in precisely the same places. Now, you say you read something!"

She seemed very much taken aback.

"Well, it was only a line or two, and I didn't understand it, anyway," she said. "But it was about money, and along with all those sums he was always doing I suppose he didn't like me seeing it. Accused me of reading it

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on purpose, which I didn't do, it being just as it caught my eye. And if he didn't want it read, he shouldn't have left it about, should he?"

"Of course not," said Cheviot. "But what I don't see is why, if it was only an accident and quite harmless anyway, you didn't tell me this before. You volunteered an account of the incident when I hadn't asked——"

"Only because I thought you'd hear of me having given in my notice."

"Actually, I didn't hear anything about that, apart from what you told me. But you were very anxious that if I did hear of it, I should hear your version—and not the true one! So you must have thought that very important."

Again she was taken aback. Though Cheviot realized that he was feeling his way through a maze, he felt that he was definitely going somewhere. Surely her reactions showed that?

"It was because he made so much fuss," she said.

"More fuss than you thought reasonable, seeing that you had only read something without understanding it?"

"And more fuss than was necessary, come to that."

"What you told me before," Cheviot insisted, "was that the 'fuss' was not on the first occasion, but on a second, when he accused you of having dusted after he told you not to. Am I to take it that all that is untrue?"

She was silent for a moment. Then she suddenly said, "As you know who killed him, I don't see why I shouldn't tell you all about it, now."

For a second he wondered how anyone could have thought that from what he had said to her. But it really did not matter: if she was so unintelligent, he was fully entitled to profit by it. He said, "I think that would be an awfully good plan. But first, I will get my sergeant to come in, so that he can take notes."

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He went to the door and called for Sergeant Kimber. Then he said to Miss Corley. "It is my duty, on an occasion like this, to warn you that anything you say may be taken down in writing and used in evidence. Now, will you please begin at the beginning?"

6

"There isn't so very much, now I come to think of it," she said. "But one day, three weeks or so ago, I'd been doing my dusting in his room, the same as usual—only it wasn't quite the same as usual, because as well as the odd scraps of paper on his desk there was a letter. I had a look at it, naturally—I mean the writing on it just caught my eye. Like it would, wouldn't it?"

Cheviot said, "What did the letter say?"

"Oh, it wasn't a bit interesting. Just a lot of grumbles, as far as I could make out."

Cheviot said, "I want to get this clear. Was the letter written by Mr. Thornton?"

"Oh no. It was a letter to him, from somebody named Whiteheart. An odd sort of name, I thought. I didn't read much of it, as a matter of fact, because it was all so dull; something about money, as far as I could make out, as you might expect with Mr. Thornton. Just business."

"You can't tell me more than that about it?"

"The bit I read was all grumbles, as I told you: something about business being very bad and no profits, and no chance of things getting better in these days. I wouldn't have thought any more about it, only Mr. Thornton made such a fuss. You'd have thought I'd robbed him, from the way he carried on."

"Tell me what he said."

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"Well, he sent for me, and he said, had he left some papers on his desk? I said, of course, just as usual, and there they were, in that heap. He said he thought he had left them spread out. I said, Well, it was all the same wasn't it, papers being papers whether you had 'em one on top of another or side by side. Then he gave me a very nasty look and he said, 'You've moved them. You've picked them up. You didn't by any chance look at them, did you?' I said, 'Well, they caught my eye.' He said, 'Oh, you read them, did you? You know what they were about?' And then I let fly a bit: not very hot, you know, but enough to tell him I wouldn't stand much more. All that silly fuss about papers!"

Cheviot said, "Well? Go on."

"He didn't say much else just then, except that he wanted his papers left as he put them, and if there were papers on his desk I wasn't to dust there at all. But the next day he got at it again. Quite chatty he was, at first, saying he didn't suppose that business letters meant much to me, as I wasn't used to that kind of thing. And being a bit rattled at him still going on about it, I said, 'Well, I can read English, anyway.' Which I shouldn't have said, I suppose, because it made him a lot worse. Not that he said much more, except, 'I see, I see,' but every time I ran into him after that he looked daggers at me, as if he wanted to kill me. And I mean that, whether you believe it or not."

"Did he?" said Cheviot. "Well, go on."

She said, "Oh. That's all."

"I don't think it is," said Cheviot. "I think when you started you meant to tell me more than that."

She did not answer. So he went on, "There is absolutely nothing in that that you couldn't have told me before. But you said that my knowing who killed him enabled you to

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tell me something you couldn't have told me otherwise. I want to know what that is."

She said, "Oh. Well, I suppose it's all right. I don't see that it can do any harm now. You see, after that he kept on all the time, day after day as you might say, giving me those nasty looks and not saying a word to go with them, till I got quite scared of him. Actually, it was somewhere in the middle of all that that I gave in my notice, not being able to stand much more of it. Only as I told you, Miss Nancy asked me to take it back, and I did, but not promising anything. I thought I'd see if he quietened down. Only he didn't, not a bit. And—well, I was quite scared of him, as anybody might be, being always looked at that way, and not knowing what he was going to do."

Cheviot said, "Yes, I understand that. But what kind of thing did you expect him to do?"

"I didn't know. I didn't see what he could do."

"And what happened?"

She hesitated. It wasn't likely that she had a sense of drama like Miss Jones, so he concluded that this was the point she would have continued to conceal if she had not misunderstood him—if she had not thought the case was at an end. He therefore smiled at her in a friendly way, and said, "Come now, Miss Corley. You told me you felt free now to tell me everything."

"Oh, I suppose it is all right," she answered. "Only I have been properly scared, I don't mind telling you. You see, I—I've been thinking I killed him."

7

By using considerable self-control, Cheviot only said, "Did you really? But it wasn't you who put a knife into him."

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"Oh no, I didn't do that. But—— Well, I'll tell you, seeing that it is all right now. You see, I always have a tumbler of water by my bed, and I drink it last thing, with a pinch of salts in, to keep my—for my health, I mean. And when I went to bed the night before last, the glass wasn't empty, which it ought to have been, seeing that I'd rinsed it out in the morning."

Cheviot said, "It is easy, when you are rinsing a glass, to leave some water in the bottom."

"There was more than that. It wasn't full, or anything like it, but there was more than a drain. And anyhow, I knew it oughtn't to have been there, not after I'd washed the glass, and it couldn't have been unless it had been put there."

"Oh," said Cheviot. "So you jumped to the conclusion that Mr. Thornton was following his nasty looks by trying to poison you. Is that it?"

He thought she answered that in a great hurry. "Not if you meant that he was trying to kill me. I never thought that, not for a minute. I mean, I know they do it in stories, and I've read lots of them, but it's not what really happens, is it?"

"Then what did you think?"

"Not that it was poison, not for a minute. But I did think he'd put something there, just to be nasty. Well, I thought it might be something to give me a stomach-ache, you know, or something like that."

With every allowance for her lack of intelligence, Cheviot found that extremely difficult to believe. Hang it all, you'd either think you were being poisoned, or you wouldn't trouble about it. Surely no one—— But he only said, "All right, Miss Corley. What did you do about it?"

"I didn't drink it, of course. I got myself a clean glass, with water straight out of the tap. And I made up my

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mind that in the morning I'd go, whether they liked it or not, and without giving my notice. I wasn't going to stay, with that sort of thing happening."

"Well?"

"Only in the morning, when I was going down to speak to Miss Nancy, I met him in the passage—Mr. Thornton, I mean—and he gave me the oddest sort of look and walked past, and then he suddenly said, 'And how are you this morning? Feeling fairly well, eh?' as if he didn't think I ought to be. So I said to myself, Oh, you nasty old devil, and—well, I thought I'd do to him what he'd done to me. Just to see how *he* liked it."

Cheviot said, "Oh, you did, did you? Does this mean that you had kept what you'd found in the tumbler, and you poured it over those two sausage rolls?"

"Straight away, as soon as I got to the kitchen," she said. "Doing it early, you see, so that they'd have time to dry before he ate them for his supper. And I put an extra helping of mustard in them, which he likes, they being home-made, so that he shouldn't notice any nasty taste if there was one."

"I see," said Cheviot.

8

Of course, he could not believe all this. If she expected him to, she should not have added all those details—of just the things that poisoners did, to make their crimes successful. How could anyone doubt, now, that she had deliberately poisoned Thornton—and that, in her fancied security because she thought he had accepted the stabbing as the cause of death, she was telling this half-artless story to account for what she had done?

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He said, "Then you didn't leave, you stayed on to see what happened?"

"Wanting to know how it took him," she explained, "after he had his supper."

"In that case," said Cheviot, "in spite of all you told me, you must have been listening very intently that evening, after 8.35."

"And you could have knocked me down with a feather," she said, "when I heard that scream, and then Mr. Peter told me he was dead."

"But you told me that Mr. Peter said then that his father had been stabbed."

"Actually, he didn't tell me then, I heard that later. But I put it in as then, when I was telling you what happened, because I was scared out of my wits, thinking I had killed him."

"But——" The trouble with this case was that so many things in it just did not make sense. And even when you got what seemed like a confession you could never trust it to be the truth. "But you knew about the stabbing before I questioned you, because by that time my sergeant had asked you about the stiletto—the knife."

She stared at him, without answering.

"And I am beginning to think," he went on, "that you knew before that. Didn't you?"

She said, "But it doesn't matter. It was the stabbing that killed him. You said it was. So I don't see why you want to know all this."

Cheviot said, "I want to know everything that happened that night. So you had better stop holding things back. Come on, now. You have said so much that you will only make me suspicious—more suspicious—if you don't tell me everything. How did you first learn that there was a knife in Mr. Thornton's body?"

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"I—I saw it," she said.

"I supposed so. Now tell me the whole thing."

9

"You see," she began, though with obvious unwillingness, "I was on the watch, most of the time, to see what happened to Mr. Thornton. Well, I kept dodging out into the passage, to listen at his door. And once I heard someone downstairs, where there oughtn't to have been anybody, with everybody out except Mr. Thornton and me. So I went to the head of the stairs and looked. And there was Dr. Hadly with that girl. Of course I didn't know who she was or what she was doing there—come to that, I didn't know what the doctor was there for either, him not being expected."

"You didn't go down and ask him?"

"No, I didn't. It was none of my business, he being one who could come and go and nobody minding. Besides, I wanted to stay listening at Mr. Thornton's door. So I went back there. Only of course I had to listen two ways at once, in case the doctor came up and caught me."

Cheviot said, "You mean you were feeling guilty?"

"Not for what I'd done, though I wouldn't have wanted to explain. But listening at keyholes isn't a thing I'd do, so I didn't want him to catch me doing it. Naturally. And after a bit I did hear him on the stairs, so I went back to my room. I heard the doctor go into Mr. Thornton's room, and then I went to the door again, to listen, though I had my own door open, then, ready to dart back, quick, if he came out."

"I take it you didn't hear either the doctor or Mr. Thornton say anything?"

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"Not a thing. But it was then I heard those bangs I told you about. Well, he stayed in there quite a time, without saying anything—it seemed very odd, to me, his not speaking and Mr. Thornton not speaking either. I couldn't make it out, anyhow. Then he came out at last—I only got into my room, with the door pushed to behind me, just in time—and he went downstairs."

"Well?"

"It seemed ever so odd—what he'd been doing in there, I mean. So—well, I pushed the door open just a crack, and looked in. And there was Mr. Thornton, with his head down on his desk—I was fair terrified, I don't mind telling you, because I was pretty sure he was dead, and if he was there was that stuff I'd given him, which might have done it."

Cheviot said, "Yes, it might, mightn't it?"

"I'd never thought till then that it could: as I told you, not thinking it was anything like that but only something nasty to give you a pain. And—and then I saw the knife, sticking out of his back. It's enough to give you the creeps, to think of it."

"But you still supposed it was the poison that had killed him?"

"I—I didn't know, really. And I supposed—though I didn't think of this till afterwards—that he couldn't have been dead when the doctor went in, or what would have been the point in killing him again? And a doctor ought to know, oughtn't he? But I didn't know what had happened. And then when you came——"

"Oh, half a minute," Cheviot said. "You were looking in through the doorway. What did you do next?"

"Well, I could hardly walk, with my knees all shaking. But I went along the passage again and looked over the baluster. And I saw Dr. Hadly come into the hall——"

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"From the kitchen?"

"Yes. I don't know what he'd been there for. Anyhow, he went out of the front door. And then I heard the crash, when that window was smashed. And—well, then I slipped down and bolted the door and put the chain up."

"Oh, you did that, did you? Why did you do it?"

"I—I don't know, really. I didn't want him to come back again, that's all."

"Let's say," said Cheviot, "that you knew then—even if you hadn't known before—that what you had given to Mr. Thornton was a poison. And just at that moment, being rather muddled, you were thinking that the poison hadn't killed him but that Dr. Hadly's knife had. And you didn't want that position disturbed, because it let you out over having committed murder. Isn't that about the size of it?"

"I didn't work it all out like that. But I didn't want him to come back and alter it all. I didn't know what he'd do. And—well, I was fair terrified, anyway."

"That comes to very much the same thing," said Cheviot. "Now, I put it to you, Miss Corley, that what you have told me has a lot of the truth in it, but is not the whole truth. You must have known that what you had given to Mr. Thornton was an overdose of his sleeping draught—and that an overdose of a sleeping draught will cause death."

"No, no," she cried. "I didn't do that. Or if I did I didn't know anything about it. I only gave him what he tried to give—what he put in my tumbler."

"I am beginning to doubt that part of the story," said Cheviot. "On your own admission, you disliked Mr. Thornton and were afraid of him—It seems very likely that you deliberately took some of his sleeping draught and tried to kill him with it."

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"No, no. I didn't do that, I never did. And—and I didn't know it was really a poison."

Suddenly she seemed to recover command of herself. "If it was, I mean," she said. "And it can't have been, because it didn't do anything. It was the knife that killed him. You said yourself——"

"I think you misunderstood me," said Cheviot. "What I said to you is that I knew who put the knife into Mr. Thornton's body. But he was already dead when he was stabbed. He died from poison—the poison which you have admitted giving to him."

10

Her face had been pale before: now it went ashen. "Oh, no, no," she cried. "I didn't kill him. I didn't mean to. I never dreamt that it could——"

Cheviot stood up. It seemed inappropriate, somehow, to arrest anyone on a charge of murder while sitting down—especially in front of a table on which were the remains of jugged hare. He said, "Winifred Corley, in view of what you have told me, it is my duty——"

He broke off, with feelings of great indignation, because at that moment the door opened and Constable Wilson came in.

"Letter for you, sir. Brought express from the Yard, sir."

Cheviot said, "Put it down." Confound these constables who barged in when they were not wanted, without even any audible knocking at the door. Wilson put the letter on the table exactly in front of him. It could wait, of course: everything must wait, now, until this business was finished. But automatically Cheviot glanced down at the

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envelope. It was marked **EXTREMELY URGENT**, the words being underlined in red. Not that that mattered, or even meant anything: nowadays, the office-wallahs at the Yard regarded all their communications as super-important and extremely urgent. . . .

But there had been an urgent letter before, containing the post-mortem report; and it had altered everything.

Cheviot wanted above all things to get on, to have this grisly business finished. In front of him was Miss Corley's face, sharp-featured and unpretty, and yet extremely pathetic in its expression of mute, horror-stricken appeal. Arresting anyone for murder—the actual moment of arrest, that is—was something he always disliked intensely. Arresting a woman for murder—now—had become worse still. And arresting a woman who was not cunning or clever, and probably not particularly vile, but only stupid and primitive, was at this moment almost unbearable. But it had to be done. And done quickly.

He opened his mouth to say "I arrest you." Then he glanced down again and, on a sudden impulse, tore open the letter. As he had expected, it contained the analyst's report on two bottles of chloral hydrate.

Thank heaven, the fellows at the Yard, even if they regarded everything they did as "urgent," had at last learnt to put their stuff into intelligible, non-scientific English.

"Bottle A., labelled for Miss Thornton, contains Draught of Chloral (Chloral Hydrate). It is prepared according to the B.P.C. prescription:

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Chloral | 20 grains |
| Liq. Extract of Liquorice | 30 minims |
| Distilled water | to 1½ fl. oz. |

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There is nothing wrong with this. Only one dose has been taken. That is not a lethal quantity.

“Bottle B., labelled for Mr. John Thornton, also contains Draught of Chloral, but it is an unusually weak solution, with only 5 grains of Chloral in 60 minims of water, the liquorice being reduced proportionately. Three doses have been taken. Therefore the total quantity of Chloral consumed from this bottle is only 15 grains. The minimum lethal dose is 20 grains. *It is thus quite impossible that the quantity taken from this bottle, if taken alone, even if swallowed as a single dose, can have caused the death of an adult.*”

CHAPTER TEN

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1

IT was extraordinarily disconcerting. If the only known source of chloral in the house was insufficient to cause death, how on earth had John Thornton been poisoned by that means? And, come to that—— In any case, it was now clear—and clear only just in time, by a matter of seconds—that Miss Corley's confession had no direct bearing on the crime.

In a manner that was almost shamefaced, therefore, Cheviot checked the words of arrest which he had been about to utter and left her room. Then, a second later, he went back, finding her still standing in horror and stupefaction beside the table, and said, rather lamely, "I have just received information—the position is now rather altered. I suppose I ought to tell you that the poison you gave to Mr. Thornton did not cause his death."

For a moment she stared at him, almost, he thought, unbelievably. Then she collapsed and began to cry, noisily, almost hysterically. It was all really rather horrible.

2

He went downstairs, got rid of Sergeant Kimber, and shut himself into the little study.

Now, he was back again where the case started. Or in an even worse position than that, because of all the problems,

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contradictions and muddles which had arisen over the case.

There was, of course, the consolation that the original set of puzzles had been cleared up. The stiletto had been brought by Dr. Hadly; the window had been broken by Dr. Hadly; the door had been bolted by Miss Corley; there had been no bloodstained clothing; the silence from Thornton's room had resulted from the action of chloral hydrate. That only left "the murderer's means of entry" out of the original list—and that, of course, must depend on the identity of the murderer.

But now, in place of that set, there were other puzzles—even worse ones.

More than anything, there was the question of the sort of man John Thornton must have been.

At the beginning of the case, he had seemed to be a very decent fellow who had won the deep affection of his children, nothing worse being known of him than that he had a streak of rather unreasonable obstinacy and was something of a recluse. But now it appeared that he had secrets which he guarded with care which seemed to suggest that they were guilty ones—he had tried, ignorantly and clumsily but nevertheless quite definitely, to murder Miss Corley—and no less than three people had planned to murder him!

All that provided problems enough and to spare. But the worst one of all was that of how the poison had been administered. . . . Cheviot broke off his thoughts, went to the telephone, and rang up the analyst. No, he learnt, there had been no poison in either of the two tins of coffee. . . . Very well then. The only food that Thornton had been known to take since his tea was those two sausage rolls. So it rather looked as if a second dose of chloral

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must have been poured onto them—which produced the almost unbelievable coincidence that two murderers, designing to kill the same man on the same night, had used precisely the same method, even to the point of laying the poison in precisely the same place!

And even then, there was the point which had arisen in Miss Corley's confession: if chloral hydrate had been poured over sausage rolls at the last minute, or anything like it, they would have remained damp and uneatable. So if that was the method which had been used, the poison must have been laid considerably earlier in the day.

And anyhow, where and how had chloral hydrate been obtained? And why had that particular drug been used, if the idea had not been to pretend that it had come from Thornton's own bottle?

3

Well, in the middle of all this tangle, there was one point which stood out very clearly. There was only one common denominator in the extraordinary events which had happened on the night of the crime—the papers in Thornton's room. Thornton had tried to murder Miss Corley because she read a letter—a harmless enough letter, according to her account of it, describing the business perplexities of somebody named "Whiteheart." And Dr. Hadly had emptied a filing cabinet of its letters and papers, and had been in a great hurry to destroy them. Could that mean that Hadly had also been after Whiteheart's letter—that it was on account of that letter that the unknown murderer had committed his crime?

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4

With this idea—and some others—in his mind, Cheviot got up and went to the sitting-room in search of Nancy Thornton. He found her, as usual, with Peter: but now she seemed to be getting over the first shock, for she was talking to her brother with some intense interest.

Peter said, "Hullo! You keep at it till all hours, apparently."

"Oh, I don't count time, when I am on a case. It is like war, you know: if you go to sleep, the enemy may stay awake and make a surprise attack—whereas if you stay awake there is just a chance that the enemy will fall asleep and allow himself to be caught. So I stay awake."

Nancy said, "Are you—are you finding out anything?"

"Oh, lots. Almost too much, at the moment. But I still want to learn more. Particularly about your father's character. 'The best father in the world,' you said. But he wasn't only a father. Do you imagine he was always as kind-hearted—to other people, I mean—as he was to both of you?"

"We got most of it, certainly," Peter answered. "Dad didn't have much to do with other people—no social life, I mean, or anything of that sort."

"You mean his charity ended, as well as beginning, at home?"

"I don't know. If you mean 'charity' literally, I don't suppose there was too much to spare after all he spent on us."

"But apart from money—he didn't like hurting people?"

Nancy said, "He couldn't have been so wonderful to us, if he hadn't been—well, thoroughly kind-hearted."

"I hardly think that follows," said Cheviot. "But let's

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take an actual instance. Would you call him 'kind' towards Miss Corley?"

Peter said, rather surprisingly, "Could anyone be? She is not the kind of creature that arouses kind feelings in me!"

"Oh, but Peter," cried Nancy, "Daddy was certainly kind to her—frightfully kind. Don't you remember?" She turned to Cheviot. "You see, we none of us like her a lot. She is so frightfully off-hand and she says what she thinks in a way that is often positively rude. We wouldn't put up with her, only that it is so hard to get anyone to live in, nowadays. So she got on Daddy's nerves and he could hardly stand the sight of her. But for all that—— You see, he had some trouble with her a few weeks ago, and she gave in her notice. Peter and I were quite delighted, because we had been trying to make up our minds to sack her and it is so much nicer to have that kind of thing decided for you. Only then Daddy said it might be difficult for her to get another place at her age, and he wanted me to ask her to take the notice back and stay on. I didn't want to, but he said he couldn't bear to feel responsible for making her lose a good job. So you see!"

It was extraordinary. At least, it would be entirely incredible if Miss Corley's story that he had tried to murder her a few days later were true. So presumably, as Cheviot had half-suspected while the story was being told to him, that was not true and Miss Corley's murder attempt had not been on the "getting her own back" principle but had been deliberate and without provocation. . . . Only in that case, what had been her motive? Could she also have been disturbed—far more disturbed than she had admitted—by something she had not mentioned, in that letter from Whiteheart?

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Cheviot said, "By the by, who is Mr. Whiteheart? Some business associate of your father's?"

Nancy and Peter both shook their heads. "Never heard of anyone of that name," said Peter.

5

Because the germ of a new idea was now in his mind, Cheviot decided that there was one line of enquiry which must now be urgently followed. It would mean a whole series of interviews, very carefully and tactfully conducted. But with luck it might lead to revelations—to the motive behind Thornton's murder, and thus even to the identity of the murderer. . . . It would be necessary to get hold of Miss Jones again. . . . He remembered with annoyance that he had never taken her home address. If she had now abandoned her hike and gone home, how on earth was he to find her in a hurry? How did one look for a girl named Jones, whose address one did not know? Yet she certainly had to be found, and found quickly. Well, the best chance would be if she had not gone home at the late hour when he set her free, but had kept to her plans and gone to the Carhampton Youth Hostel. So Sergeant Kimber was sent off in the car, with instructions to trace the girl and find her, and to bring her back at all costs without delay. . . .

6

Cheviot then went to see Dudley Penn, who apparently was not taking advantage, that evening, of his new freedom to visit the Thorntons' house. He found him in his diggings.

"Hullo," said Dudley. "You're a late visitor. But I'll

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do my best to sound intelligent if you want to put me through it again."

Cheviot sat down in the very hard arm-chair and tried to look at his ease and not particularly official.

"Thanks," he said. "Though I am not expecting this talk to be a great strain on your intellect. It is just that I am still a bit puzzled about Mr. Thornton's objections to you as a son-in-law."

Dudley grinned at him. "As a matter of fact, so am I! I should have thought I was an absolute snip, whom any prospective father-in-law would have been glad to catch."

Cheviot smiled back—he could always manage that kind of thing in a good cause. "With a four-figure income you certainly ought to have been. But apparently you weren't—to Mr. Thornton, anyhow. The question is why you weren't. Was it anything in your murky past?"

"Oh, I've an honourable record. As far as a journalist can, that is. I never disgraced myself by becoming an editor, so I was always able to keep my integrity. And as a matter of fact, by throwing up an inside job in favour of free-lancing, I put myself still more on the side of the angels, because now I can refuse any assignment that I don't think sufficiently high-minded and soul-uplifting. That sounds good, don't you think?"

"Oh, it impresses me," said Cheviot, "though apparently it left Mr. Thornton quite cold. What sort of thing was the inside job?"

"Your line of country," Dudley explained. "Or nearly. I was assistant crime-reporter on the *Daily Telephone*."

"Really? Then I am hardly the first police-inspector you've met?"

"Heavens, no. If you want to take up references on me, you can ask half a dozen of the big boys at the Yard."

"And be told you have always been an infernal nuisance

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to them!" retorted Cheviot. "I don't think that would help you much. You told Mr. Thornton you'd done that job, I suppose?"

"Yes, I did."

"And did it win you any good marks?"

"Er, no. As a matter of fact, that was the occasion when he told me journalism was a pretty low form of life."

Cheviot laughed. You could always hide any signs of particular interest behind a laugh. "If he felt like that about your job, it is pretty clear why he objected to you. You know, I rather think that clears that point, Mr. Perm."

He got up to go. At the door, he said, "If I had the time, I'd like to discuss some of the Yard's famous cases with you: you'd have seen things from another angle, and it would be interesting. Were you in on the Whiteheart case?"

"Whiteheart? No, I've never heard of it. What kind of case was it?"

"Bucket-shop, or some other form of financial swindle," said Cheviot. "I think the man had an alias, but I can't remember what it was. The name 'Whiteheart' doesn't mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing," said Dudley. "Sorry, inspector. I'd have been most happy to help, you know, but even if you had said straight out that that was the question you'd really come to ask, I couldn't have said anything different."

"Damn," said Cheviot, under his breath.

In spite of that momentary annoyance, Cheviot returned to the Thornton's house with a certain amount of

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exhilaration, for he felt that his new idea was beginning to take on a little shape.

There he found Sergeant Kimber eagerly awaiting him.

"I've got her, sir," he cried. "She was at the Hostel, in the boiler room, drying that rucksack. She didn't want to come, of course—said she'd had enough of you . . . of the police, I mean, sir——"

"That's all right," said Cheviot. "I'll take it as a compliment."

He went into the little study, where Janet Jones was awaiting him.

"Well, this really is the limit," she cried. "There was I, repairing the ravages of your abominable persecution, and just about ready to slip into a comfortable bed—and I was dragged here, more or less by the scruff of my neck. Why on earth can't you leave me alone?"

"It is absolutely necessary for the prosecution of my case——" Cheviot began, a little too formally.

"I feel just like Henry-the-What-not," she cried. "You know—'Will nobody rid me?' and all that. Not that I've very much hope that anyone would murder you if I did say it. Or would someone, do you think? There's that sergeant of yours. He seems fairly nice and quite human, so he must simply hate you. I think I'll try it on him."

"If you'll just remember that this is a serious matter," said Cheviot. "I have some very vital questions to ask you."

"Oh, what fun," she retorted. "I simply love being asked questions."

With an effort he refrained from answering sarcasm in its own manner.

He said, "Does the name 'Whiteheart' mean anything to you?"

She stared at him, her manner changing suddenly to

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seriousness. "N—no," she said. "Well, I don't know anyone called that."

With quick intuition, he asked, "Has someone asked you that question before?"

"Oh yes. The man who brought me here—you said he was a doctor, didn't you?—asked exactly the same thing."

Repressing his excitement, Cheviot said, "In the car, you mean? Tell me in detail about the whole of that conversation."

"He properly put me through it, though it was all wrapped up with talk about the country and hiking and that sort of thing, so that it didn't look too much as if he was pumping me. But he wanted to know if I'd ever been here before, or anywhere in the neighbourhood; and when I said I hadn't, he asked if I had any friends here. I haven't, of course. Then he wanted to know where I lived and I told him Hampstead—well, that isn't true, really, because it is Kentish Town, only I feel that Hampstead sounds more posh, and it is only half a mile away, anyhow. And then he said he had a friend named Whiteheart in north-west London, and did I happen to know him? I said I didn't, which I don't, and I don't know why I should, seeing that there must be about a couple of million people in north-west London that I don't know, mustn't there?"

"Yes," said Cheviot. "He didn't tell you anything else about Whiteheart?"

"Not a thing," she answered.

"Very well," he said. "Now, I want you to remain here for a bit. I may have some more questions to ask you later."

"Oh, just as you like," she said. "Only if I'm going to be here all night, how about somebody lending me some pyjamas?"

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8

Cheviot then went to look for Miss Corley. He tapped at the door of her sitting-room but received no answer. He then went in, but she was not there . . . and, to his amazement, he saw by the clock on her mantelpiece that the time was twenty minutes past eleven. Still, with the scent so strong, he could not possibly leave the case in the air. From his search of the house when he was looking for chloral hydrate, he knew which was Miss Corley's bedroom, and now he went there.

Her voice answered his knocking: "What is it? What is it?" in agitated tones.

"Inspector Burmann. I have got to speak to you at once."

There was a moment's silence. Then, quaveringly, "Not—not something else?"

"Quite a lot else. I must see you immediately."

Another silence. Then, "But I'm in bed."

"Then put a wrap round you. I'll expect you in your sitting-room in five minutes."

He waited most impatiently for nearly a quarter of an hour. Miss Corley, he gathered, had been too much upset by their last interview even to clear away the remains of the supper. Well, perhaps she would be more upset still after this one. In any event, the case was drawing near its end. Just a little more information, and he would know definitely who had killed John Thornton.

When at last she came in, she was fully dressed but in a pitiable state of agitation.

"But you said," she cried at once, as if in answer to some statement of his, "that I hadn't killed him."

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"What I actually said," he retorted, "was that the poison taken from his bottle of sleeping draught, which you say is what you poured over those sausage rolls, had not killed him. That is not quite the same thing. If you had had some other source of the poison——"

"I've told you—I know I did. I didn't even know it was poison."

"Then why haven't you told me everything? Why have you been keeping things back?"

"There's nothing I've kept back—that I'm sure of."

"Isn't there?" said Cheviot. "We'll see. You've told me you saw Dr. Hadly go into Mr. Thornton's room, and afterwards you looked in yourself and saw that Mr. Thornton had been stabbed. As you didn't know of anyone else having gone in, you assumed that Dr. Hadly was responsible for that. Is that right?"

"There wasn't anyone else who could have done it."

"Oh yes, there was. There was the girl you'd seen in the hall."

"Oh. Well, I didn't think of her."

"I wonder why you didn't. You knew Dr. Hadly pretty well, and you can't have thought he was the kind of man who would go about stabbing people. It is a bit unusual, anyway, for doctors to stab their own patients. And yet you assumed that of Dr. Hadly. That is rather odd, you know. You are sure you didn't have any other reason for it?"

"I've told you," she said, "I didn't think there was anyone else."

"I daresay you didn't think of the girl in the first minute. But afterwards—— I reminded you about the girl and questioned you about her. By the by, you knew by then that either Mr. Thornton had died from the stabbing or else you had poisoned him, and naturally you wanted

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to believe that it wasn't your doing. Or, more particularly, you wanted *me* to believe that. Then why didn't you tell me about Dr. Hadly having been to Mr. Thornton's room?"

She flushed at that. "I didn't know—what was the best thing to do. I didn't want to start anything."

"Start anything?"

"Well, I thought it was best not to know too much."

"Then you didn't really believe that Dr. Hadly had killed him?"

"I didn't know. I told you I was scared."

"You know, this doesn't sound at all sensible," said Cheviot. "Or even reasonable. Or even—come to that—true. But what I most want to get at is why, when you had time to think about what had happened, it still didn't strike you as highly unlikely that Dr. Hadly would murder Mr. Thornton. Or did you think it wasn't so unlikely?"

She said, "Well, they had quarrelled."

"Come to that, you had quarrelled with Mr. Thornton yourself."

"Not that bad, I hadn't. I mean, I'd only stood up for myself, like you have to."

"You don't know how badly Dr. Hadly quarrelled with him. You didn't hear a word he said, Or so you've told me."

"And I didn't. But he shouted."

"You can't even guess what that was about?"

"No. I wouldn't know. But it must have been something."

Cheviot said, "I think I can guess what it was about. And I think you know what it was about."

"No, I don't," she said. "I tell you I didn't hear anything."

"Wasn't it about that man named Whiteheart?"

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She said, "Oh. Well, it might have been, I suppose, if there was anything——"

"Then you did tell Dr. Hadly about that letter you had read?"

"When I went to see him, wanting something for my nerves. He asked what had got me fussed, and I told him."

"I see. And I suppose you told him all the details, including what was in the letter?"

"I didn't know what was in it. I told you. There was nothing I could understand, except grumbles about business."

"At any rate you told him that, and that it was from someone called Whiteheart? Was he interested?"

"If you ask me, he didn't behave as a doctor should. Quite offhand, he was, and then he said I was imagining things and getting worked up when there was nothing wrong with me. And he sent me away, without even a bottle."

Cheviot said, "Perhaps there wasn't anything wrong with you, Miss Corley. Perhaps you didn't go to consult the doctor about your health, but only to tell him what you had found out about Mr. Thornton's private affairs."

"That's a lie," she said. "I didn't do anything of the sort. And I hadn't 'found out' anything, it was just that something happened to catch my eye."

As he had still not got all the information he needed, and saw no immediate hope of getting it out of Miss Corley, Cheviot left her and went downstairs. His watch showed him that it was past midnight: rather late for his

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next interview, even in these circumstances. Besides, he had things to think out now, and that was more urgent than anything else.

He went into the sitting-room and made himself comparatively comfortable on the settee, suddenly realizing how very tired he was after twenty-four hours of continuous work, with only a disturbed three-hour break in the early hours of the previous morning. Yet he could not afford to let-up now, with this problem still unsolved.

He was beginning, he believed, to get a line on the motive for the murder—though of course the application of the motive depended on the identity of the murderer. But as yet he was nowhere near to knowing how the murder had been committed. Or even how it *could* have been committed.

It did not seem so likely now that a considerable additional dose of chloral could have been soaked into those two sausage rolls without the "pungent, somewhat bitter taste" being noticeable, even over that of mustard. But apparently Thornton had eaten nothing else since tea—and if he had been poisoned then, the effects would have shown themselves long before 8.45. Nor, as far as was known, had he drunk anything except coffee—and that he had made himself from coffee which had since been analysed and found to be harmless. Something put into the bottom of his cup? But how could anyone have known which cup he would use? Something in the sugar? But a fluid such as chloral hydrate would have dissolved the sugar. Something added after the coffee was prepared? But what opportunity could there have been? Unless the whole story of his taking up his own supper was false, and it had on this occasion been brought to him. That, of course, was just possible. By Miss Corley? By Peter? By Nancy?

Impatiently, because all this appeared insoluble, Cheviot

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took out his little book on poisons and studied the paragraphs on Chloral Hydrate. He read the symptoms: and then he wondered what signs had led Dr. Hadly to conclude that Thornton had been poisoned by a narcotic, and whether he had recognized the narcotic as chloral. The visible symptoms seemed to be much the same as those from morphine. In any case, it hardly mattered whether Hadly had recognized it as a case of chloral poisoning or not. Or did it?

Cheviot felt that a longing for sleep was overcoming him, but he pulled himself together. This question must be dealt with. How had the poisonous dose been administered?

He took from his pocket the report of the Yard's analyst, and read it again. "Three doses only have been taken . . . only 15 grains . . . the minimum lethal dose It is thus quite impossible. . . ." "Oh hell!" Cheviot let the paper slip from his hand. Then he suddenly became aware that there were two sheets to the report, instead of only one as he had imagined when he first hurriedly read it at the moment when he had been about to arrest Miss Corley. That first sheet had ended in a way that appeared to be final. But more followed on the second page.

"The contents of this bottle are not entirely pure, there being infinitesimal quantities of copper and lead. Further tests are being conducted to discover the cause of this, but as a provisional theory—which may be contradicted later—it is suggested that the solution might have been prepared by an amateur who used tap water instead of distilled water."

Cheviot read that three times, with all temptation to sleep banished from his mind. For in it he saw—or thought he saw—the solution of the whole case.

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He was awake for another two hours, working it all out. Then, with a sigh of relief, he settled down to sleep. The morning would be early enough for the rest of what he had to do.

10

He was up at half past six, making tea for himself in the kitchen. At seven he set out, with Sergeant Kimber, and went to Dr. Hadly's house.

He was kept waiting for several minutes. Then Hadly appeared and said, "You're a very early bird. Have you been up and at it all night? What's the bright idea?"

"I have several bright ideas," Cheviot answered. "I have come to test them. And I think the best plan will be for you and me to have a private talk: I shall tell my sergeant to wait outside the door."

"Oh, just as you like," said Hadly. "Though I've nothing to say that can't go down on the records."

"I am not so sure of that," said Cheviot.

He did not completely know why he was adopting that unusual plan. But he had an odd feeling—it was rather peculiar, really—that if his theory was right and the case was brought quickly to the conclusion he was now anticipating, he would go home and tell his Kathleen all about it, and she would say, "Oh, I am glad you did it that way, Cheviot." And then, probably—possibly—she would say, "You know, darling, you are almost becoming human in these days." And that, although quite absurd in its implication that he had not been "human" before, would be altogether delightful—in the way Kathleen would say it to him.

Sergeant Kimber therefore remained outside, though

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within call, while Cheviot settled down for this very vital talk with Dr. Hadly.

11

"Will it surprise you very much," Cheviot began, "if I tell you that two days ago Mr. Thornton tried to murder Miss Corley?"

The second's delay before the doctor answered showed that it was a surprise—though whether the surprise was at the news or at Cheviot knowing about it, was, of course, a separate question. Then Hadly said, "Oh, come, inspector. That is very unlikely. Quite absurd, in fact."

"She had been reading his papers—one letter, in particular. A letter from a Mr. Whiteheart. She told you about that, didn't she?"

"Anything a patient tells me," Hadly said, "is a professional secret."

"Then I won't ask you, I'll just tell you. She came here asking for something for 'nerves,' and you asked what was fussing her. She then told you about the letter from Whiteheart. Apparently the letter meant nothing to her, except that it contained a lot of grumbles; but she had implied to Thornton that she understood its purport. That must have alarmed Thornton very much—very much indeed. His first reaction was that he must keep her in the house, where he could deal drastically with her if necessary: so when she announced her intention of leaving, he persuaded his daughter to get her to stay on. Then he panicked still more, and decided to murder her."

Dr. Hadly said, "Is this just guess-work, inspector?"

"It is a theory. But I think you can confirm it. The

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name 'Whiteheart' meant nothing to Miss Corlsey. But it meant a great deal to you, didn't it?"

"Whiteheart? Whiteheart? I don't think——"

"Before you deny that you know the name," said Cheviot, "I had better remind you, first that I shall be able to trace the man and his connection with Thornton, and second that I know that you asked Miss Jones whether she knew him."

Dr. Hadly said, "Oh. You pick up everything, don't you? All right, then. Ten years ago, William Whiteheart was John's partner in business. But the partnership was broken up, in what you would call 'suspicious circumstances.' The thing was hushed up—John wouldn't prosecute—but it was all rather a nasty affair."

"Why wouldn't Thornton prosecute?"

"Oh—kindness of heart, I suppose."

"I don't think so," said Cheviot. "Come to that, neither do you, Dr. Hadly. If it had been that, Whiteheart wouldn't now have been writing to Thornton with expostulations about the difficulty of finding money. And if you had believed it to be that, you would not have had to ascertain that Miss Jones did not know Whiteheart before you could use her as your scapegoat. It is quite obvious—and much more than guess-work—that anyone closely connected with Whiteheart could have had a motive for murdering John Thornton. It is also obvious that the reason why Thornton had not prosecuted Whiteheart was that he could get a lot of money—a regular income, in fact—out of him by letting him go free. In other words, Thornton was making money out of Whiteheart by blackmailing him."

"That's an unnecessary word, I think," said Hadly. "Whiteheart stole from John—John was entitled to get the money back."

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"If it had been as comparatively innocent as that, Thornton would not have objected to having as son-in-law a man who had connections with the police. Nor would he have been scared over Miss Corley having read that letter. And you would not have behaved as you did."

"Oh, it was no business of mine."

"Yet you made it your business. Very much your business. And if you don't want to tell me why, I'll tell you. You are a childless widower. In those circumstances, you have taken to Nancy and Peter Thornton almost as if they were children of your own. You haven't had to finance them—their father had plenty of money for that—but you have been their friend. I remember Peter saying 'We depend on Uncle Charles in all emergencies.' I expect they mean more to you than anyone else in the world."

"Well?" demanded Hadly. "There's no harm in that, is there?"

"None at all. But just because of that, it was a terribly painful shock for you when you first suspected that they have been living for years—and living pretty luxuriously, with Oxford University and trips round the world, and so on—on money obtained by the most filthy of all methods—blackmail. I think you are a man of considerable integrity, Dr. Hadly. You believe in clean living and clean money. And apart from that very natural horror, there must have been the fear that Nancy and Peter would one day find out: both where the money came from, and that their much-loved father was not the decent man they had always believed him to be. I think you would do anything—literally, anything—to spare them the pain of that."

Dr. Hadly said, "Oh, I agree that if I had suspected anything as horrid as that, I should have checked up with

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John—I should have persuaded him to stop the wretched business.”

“You tried,” said Cheviot. “It was three weeks ago that Miss Corley mentioned Whiteheart’s letter to you and thus aroused your suspicions. It is also just about three weeks since you arranged with Peter and Nancy that you should have private talks with their father—nominally about Nancy and young Perm. But I don’t think that was what you discussed with him: I think that all your efforts were to get him to abandon blackmail. But you didn’t get anywhere, did you? On the contrary, I think, you learnt from him that his blackmailing racket didn’t stop at the Whiteheart business—obviously, one man couldn’t produce the kind of income Thornton had and spent—and you realized that it wasn’t merely a case of getting back owed money, or stolen money, but was the dirty business on a large scale. And it would go on, whatever you said.”

Very calmly, Dr. Hadly said, “Well? I take it you think you are disclosing my motive for wanting John’s death?”

“Yes, I do think that,” said Cheviot.

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“I think,” Cheviot went on, “that even murder seemed better to you than letting Nancy and Peter suffer. But I don’t suppose you liked the idea of it. Even after you had realized that there was no practical alternative, and had accordingly made your plan and begun your preparations, you made one last effort to get Thornton to see reason: yesterday evening you staged that last talk with him, when you first appealed to him—probably on emotional levels—and finally stormed at him. You will remember that you persuaded me that there would have been no point in

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arguing with him and storming at him if you knew he was to die within a matter of hours. But actually there was every reason for doing that—if it was your last chance of avoiding murder.”

Hadly said, “I don’t admit any of this, inspector, as far as my alleged motive is concerned. And I don’t admit to any knowledge that John was doing blackmail. But I have already confessed to the intention to kill John, so—if you will excuse me for putting it in this way—I don’t see why you are fussing yourself. We both know that I *didn’t* murder John, because somebody else had killed him by the time I came on the scene. So what are you getting at? What on earth is the point of this private talk between us, and all that?”

“Oh, that?” said Cheviot. “Well, my whole theory is based on the idea that the one thing you are anxious about—more than you care about either Thornton’s life or your own, actually—is that this blackmail story shouldn’t come out, should not reach the ears of Nancy and Peter. So in case my sergeant should not be as discreet as I might be——”

“Oh, I see,” said Hadly. “That’s very considerate of you inspector. Thank you very much. Have we finished now?”

“Far from it,” Cheviot answered. “I now have to find John Thornton’s murderer.”

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“Not,” said Cheviot, “that I think that will be difficult, now. Particularly if I am right in thinking that we are beginning to understand each other, Dr. Hadly. To put things in the shortest way possible, my belief is that at

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about 8.45 last night you crept up, as you have told me, to Mr. Thornton's room, with the intention of stabbing him, You found him collapsed in a coma across his desk, and——"

Dr. Hadly said, "Forgive me for interrupting you, inspector, but I told you I found him dead."

"I know you did; and at the time I accepted that. But now I know a great deal more. For one thing, the quantity of chloral hydrate missing from the bottle supplied to him two months ago is only three doses—even assuming that he had not previously taken any, he cannot have been given more than three doses last night. And as it is only a 5 grain solution, the quantity he was given cannot have been more than 15 grains—which, as you know, is not a lethal dose."

Dr. Hadly said, "Oh. Well, of course. Unless, that is, the murderer had some other source of the poison. In fact he must have done, because I can assure you that John was dead when I found him; and as a doctor I really ought to know a dead man from a live one."

"There is another possibility," said Cheviot. "Perhaps the bottle contained the more usual 20 grain solution, not merely a 5 grain one."

"Oh. No, it didn't, of course. I prepared it, and I ought to know. I can show you my records, if you like."

"I'd be glad if you would," said Cheviot, "just to check the point."

Then, as the doctor moved towards his dispensary, he said, "By the by, was Mr. Thornton a private patient or one under the National Health?"

"Oh, National Health. He wasn't a man to waste his money, even on anything so vital as doctoring."

"Then you needn't bother to show me your records," said Cheviot. "You will have sent in your prescription for

charging, and I can get it from the Ministry of Health. That will be more satisfactory, don't you think? I mean, the prescription was written out at the time the dispensing was done, so it is bound to be accurate: whereas your records may have been done later and might possibly have an error in them."

Hadly said, "Oh, I see. That is remarkably mistrustful of you, inspector."

"Oh well, you know my passion for checking everything. Now shall I go on? You see, however it happened, and however you came not to appreciate the fact—if that is what occurred—Thornton was *not* a dead man when you found him."

Hadly said, "I deny that absolutely. And incidentally you haven't a chance of proving your contention."

"No?" said Cheviot. "Well let us go on with my assumption, even if it is not proved or provable. I contend that you found Thornton in a coma, that by a superficial examination you discovered that he was suffering from narcotic poisoning, and that from the smell in his breath you recognized the narcotic as chloral. You also realized that although not dead he was dying—only the time that chloral takes to kill is very uncertain, and while it looked to you as if his death would occur at any minute it might take considerably longer than that."

"My further contention," Cheviot continued, "is that you had no thought of applying treatment, because you meant Thornton to die. I accept your statement that the presence of poison was extremely disconcerting for you, because even if this could not be a death from stabbing you wanted it to appear to be that: and that therefore you intended to leave the stiletto in the body in the hope that the police would accept that as the cause of death and not have a post-mortem. But I think that at this point you had

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—shall I say ‘qualms?’ You are, if I may so, a decent man, with normally decent feelings. For the sake of Nancy and Peter, you had screwed yourself up to killing Thornton, by stabbing him. But now things had gone wrong with the plan, and you were badly shaken and out of gear. It was still vitally necessary in your view for him to die: but if he was going to die, within a matter of minutes, by someone else’s hand, that would be much better for you. Why should you force yourself to the extremely distasteful act of murder, if the necessity could be avoided by his dying otherwise within the next few minutes? So you rearranged your time-table. You took his keys from his pocket and emptied his filing cabinet, making sure that you had every paper which concerned his blackmailing activities. And every few minutes you were looking anxiously at him, in the hope of finding him dead. You know, I think those minutes must have been extremely bad for your nervous condition.”

Hadly said, “I’d be more interested in all this if it wasn’t a fairy-tale. You have admitted that you cannot prove a word of it: it is no more than a speculative theory. And of course it is entirely false.”

Ignoring that, Cheviot continued, “Very bad, I was saying, for your nervous condition. In fact, you must have become almost frantic as Thornton still continued to breathe. If only he would die, and die quickly! Because in the condition you were reaching, you may have felt that there was quite a difference between stabbing an active man and stabbing someone who was asleep and quite helpless; and in any case it would obviously be a thousand times easier if all you had to do was to drive a knife into a dead body.”

Dr. Hadly said, “You are crediting me with an extra-

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ordinary sensitiveness, inspector. But never mind—if you think that improves the fairy-tale.”

“In any case,” said Cheviot, “the idea occurred to you eventually that Thornton’s death—from chloral hydrate—could be speeded up. You couldn’t wait much longer for the man to die—you had that 9 o’clock appointment, which was essential to your alibi, to think of. But if an additional and stronger dose of chloral were given to him then, within an hour of the earlier dose given to him by somebody else, it would finish him off very quickly. So you did that. I am not very sure of my mathematics, but I think you poured down his throat about 9 additional doses. Of course that killed him within a matter of minutes. Only it left a bottle containing only 4 doses, and that wouldn’t do, because Miss Corley might have noticed the bottle that morning or later and have been able to swear that only 3 doses had then gone from it. So you filled up the bottle with water from the bathroom tap. And afterwards—when you got home after leaving the stiletto in the body—you faked your records to show that what you had supplied to Thornton was a 5 grain solution, not one of 20 grains. Only you forgot that the original prescription would be found at the Ministry of Health, and that that would give you away.”

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Dr. Hadly cleared his throat and said, “I must have been a perfect fool, if I did all that. I’d have known that a post-mortem would show that there were more than 15 grains in the body.”

“You were taking chances all through, as every murderer does,” Cheviot countered. “And you were bank-

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ing on there being no post-mortem in what would appear, quite obviously, to be a case of stabbing."

"And I would have known that the difference between tap water and distilled water would be discovered in analysis."

"There would have been no analysis if poisoning had not been suspected, as the result of the post-mortem."

"I see," said Hadly. "Well, it all sounds very chancy to me: hardly the method one would expect from a scientific man, you know."

"That," said Cheviot, "is why I took the trouble to emphasize that you were badly rattled at the time. Well now, that is my case. On it, I propose to arrest you and charge you with John Thornton's murder."

For a moment Hadly was silent. Then he said, "The only point you have which in any way approaches proof is the possibility that I have faked my records. And against that I can contend that I only made a slip—being badly over-worked at the time. I can point out that I must have known the prescription could be recovered from the Ministry, and therefore any deliberate faking would have been moronic if not actually insane."

"Yes," said Cheviot. "You might possibly score on that point."

"Then you agree that you have no proof to support this charge?"

"No," said Cheviot. "I don't agree there. I am quite certain that you are guilty, Dr. Hadly, and I think I have a wealth of circumstantial evidence which will bring a conviction. I have, in the first place, your confession that you intended to commit the murder. I have Miss Jones's evidence that you were concerned about Whiteheart, at the moment when murder was in your mind. I have Miss

Corley's evidence that you 'stormed' at Thornton at a time when you claim to have been having only a friendly conversation with him. I can prove that your alleged 'confession' was full of deliberate lies. And of course I can bring out in court the full story of Thornton as a blackmailer to establish your motive."

Hadly said, "I see, I see. Yes, I do see, indeed."

He was silent then for fully five minutes, deep in thought, while Cheviot sat watching him.

At last he looked up and smiled, rather wanly. He said, "Very well, inspector. As you said just now, I always knew I was taking a chance. But a chance was better than a thing that seemed to have become practically a certainty. You are quite right when you say I have now only one personal desire in life—to protect Nancy and Peter and to keep them happy. If they knew about their father, they would lose all happiness, through the whole of their lives. If you will forgive me for being a trifle sentimental—you see, there is Nancy on the threshold of what has every chance of being a happy marriage, and there is Peter with a promising career and all the good things in life before him. All that could go—would be certain to go—if they learnt the truth about their father. And John was becoming careless, terribly careless. He was keeping incriminating papers in a cheap filing cabinet with a lock that could easily be picked, even by an amateur—I know that, because once when I was alone in his room I did pick that lock, in order to make quite sure that my suspicions were well founded. He was even leaving dangerous letters on his desk—and if Miss Corley could find and read them, so also might Peter or Nancy. Sooner or later—well, it seemed to me to be certain that if John lived and continued his abominably beastly work, those children would learn about it. And——"

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Dr. Hadly paused and shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose you are too official to agree with me, but it seemed to me that the death of a blackmailer did not matter very much, whereas the happiness of two quite innocent young people mattered tremendously. So, since there was no other way of stopping the blackmail—or even of keeping it permanently secret—I decided to kill John. Of course, I knew that things might go wrong, for all my care. But I thought that, even then, once I had burnt all the papers, I should be able to keep my motive secret and thus still prevent those children from ever learning the terrible truth."

Again he paused. Then—— "You've been too clever for me, though. Well—do I understand that you have not questioned either Nancy or Peter about blackmail? And that you haven't even hinted to them of your suspicions?"

Cheviot said, "Up to the present, you know about the blackmail and I know about it. So, I suppose, do the victims of it, including this man Whiteheart: but they won't talk about it, naturally. No one else knows of it. And my sergeant, as you have noted, is not in this room. So until the Prosecution's case is presented in detail in Court——"

Dr. Hadly said, "Yes, inspector, I quite get that point. Very well, then. Have in your sergeant now, and I will dictate a full confession, giving every detail—but not mentioning my motive or anything about blackmail. When I come into Court, I will plead 'Guilty' and take the rap. Then the proceedings will be over in a few minutes, and there will be no disclosures. I am afraid it will be a painful shock to Peter and Nancy to lose their uncle, and they will be rather mystified—— But that won't matter so very much, will it? You see, I just don't care in the slightest

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about anything, so long as they don't learn about their father."

Slowly, Cheviot rose to his feet. He repressed an absurd desire to shake this murderer by the hand. Then he went to the door and called in Sergeant Kimber.

